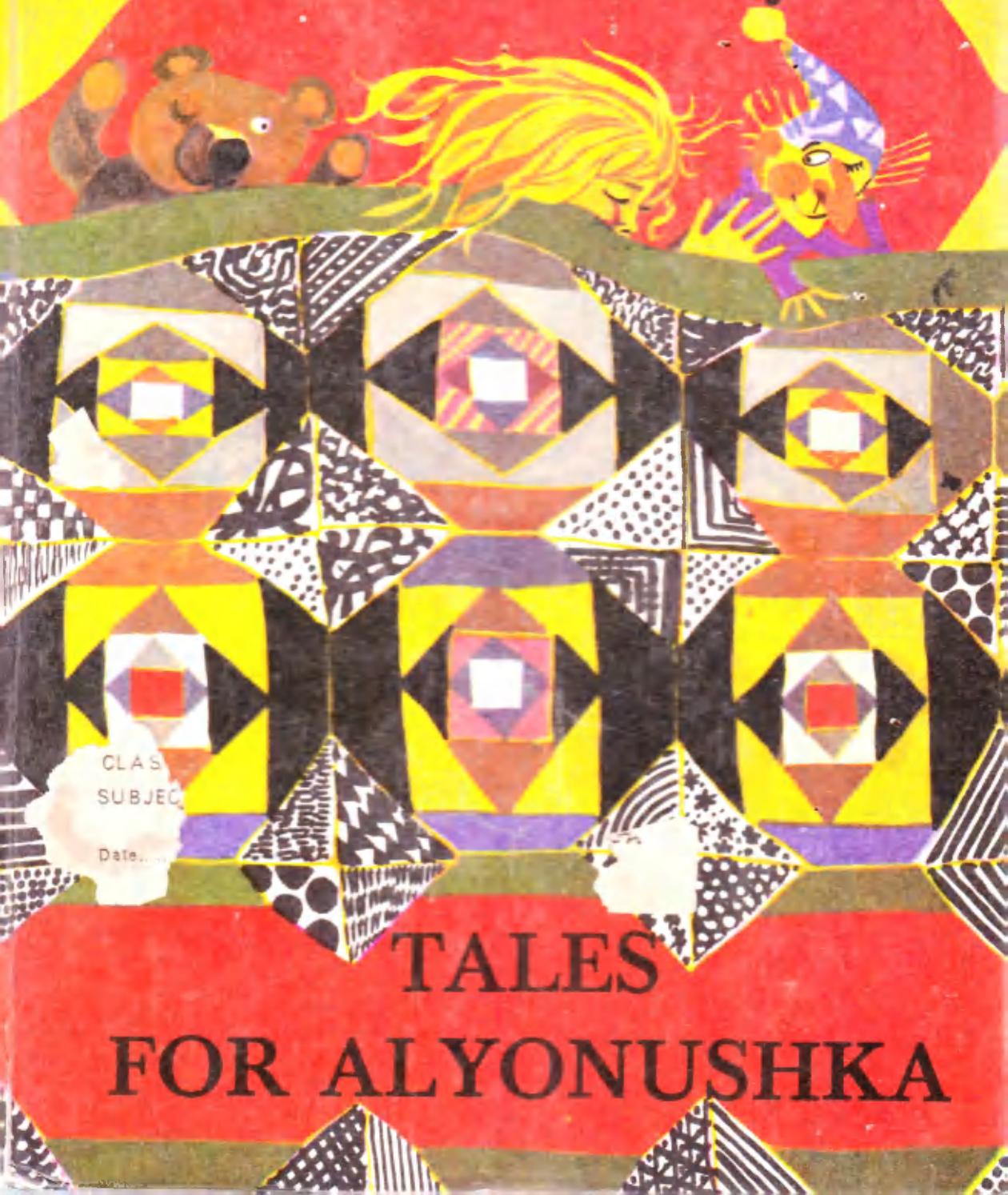


D. Mamin-Sibiryak



TALES  
FOR ALYONUSHKA





# D. Mamin-Sibiryak



# TALES FOR ALYONUSHKA



Translated by Irina Zheleznova  
Drawings by Georgi Yudin

Д. Мамин-Сибиряк  
АЛЕНУШКИНЫ СКАЗКИ  
На английском языке

©Издательство Прогресс 1978  
©Progress Publishers. Illustrated. 1978  
Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

4803010102 M ~~70802 - 122~~  
014 (01) - 79 153 - 78

D. Mamin-Sibiryak's "Tales  
for Alyonushka"

6	
8	The Little Tale Before the Big Tale
11	Long-Ears—Squint-Eyes—Stub-Tail, The Bravest Rabbit fo Them All
17	Teeny-Weeny Bug
25	Stingy-Wingy—Long-Nose the Mosquito and Shaggy-Raggy—Button-Tail the Bear
33	Vanka-Vstanka's Birthday Party
45	Quicky-Tricky the Sparrow, Handy-Dandy the Ruff and Yasha the Cheerful the Cheerful Chimney Sweep
55	The Last of the Flies
67	Blackie the Big Black Crow and Goldie the Little Yellow Canary
79	Turkey-Perky, the Cleverest of the Birds
91	A Parable About Milk, Oatmeal and Murka the Tomcat
99	Time for Bed

## D. Mamin-Sibiryak's "Tales for Alyonushka"\*\*

It is dark outside, and the falling snow, clinging to the window panes, draws pretty patterns on the glass. Alyonushka is in bed, curled up into a ball, waiting for her father to tell her a fairy tale. She will not go to sleep till he does.

Alyonushka's father, Dmitry Mamin-Sibiryak, a writer, is at his desk, bent over a manuscript. He puts it aside now, and, moving his armchair up to Alyonushka's bed, prepares to do as his daughter has asked. The little girl listens, all ears, as he tells her about a foolish turkey who thought himself the cleverest of the birds, and then about a birthday party to which came all her toys. They are lovely fairy tales, but already one of Alyonushka's eyes is closing.... Sleep, Alyonushka, sleep, little beauty.

Her head resting on her palm, Alyonushka falls asleep. It is still snowing outside....

It was thus the two of them, father and daughter, passed the long winter evenings. Alyonushka grew up without her mother, who died when she was a baby, but her father loved her with all his heart and did everything to make her happy.

As he looked at his little daughter asleep in her bed, he recalled his own childhood, passed in a small workers' settlement in the Urals. D. Mamin-Sibiryak was born in 1852, and in those days the workers living in the settlement and employed at the plant there were serfs who toiled from morning till night and never knew anything but the direst poverty. Unlike them, their masters lived in luxury. Very often, on their way to work in the morning, the workingmen would see ornate sledges, each drawn by three horses, sweeping past them: the rich and idle were returning home from a ball or party that had lasted all night.

D. Mamin-Sibiryak's parents were far from rich and had to count every penny. But they were warm-hearted people, ready to help anyone who needed their help, and their house was always full of visitors. Dmitry loved it when some of the workingmen from the plant were among them. They knew so many thrilling stories! Of these he remembered best the legend about Marzak the Robber, who, so the legend ran, hid in the Ural forests in times of old. Marzak attacked the rich, took away their money and things and divided them among the poor. The tsarist police had never been able to catch him. Dmitry listened to the legend, spellbound. He longed to be as daring and as just when he grew up as Marzak.

The thick forest that, according to the legend, had been Marzak's hiding place, began within several minutes' walking distance of the Mamins' house. There were squirrels there, skipping from branch to branch, and rabbits, and, deeper in the thicket, bears.

The future writer knew every path in the countryside. He wandered along the banks of the Chusovaya River and admired the beauty of the mountains. Thickly grown with spruces and birches, they were rugged and huge, and it was this that gave him the sense of freedom and space that he always associated with nature.

His parents taught Dmitry to love books, and the boy spent days on end poring over Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev and Nekrasov who were his favourite authors. A passion for writing was early born in him, and at the age of sixteen he began keeping a diary.

Years passed, and D. Mamin-Sibiryak became the first writer to depict life in the Urals. He wrote dozens of novels and hundreds of short stories in which he lovingly described the ordinary people and their struggle against oppression and injustice.

Mamin-Sibiryak also wrote for children. He was eager to teach them to see and appreciate the beauty of nature, to treasure the riches of the earth, and to love and respect toiling man. "It is a great joy to write for children," he said. The fairy tales Mamin-Sibiryak once told his daughter he later published in book form under the title of "Tales for Alyonushka". In these tales the bright colours of a sunny summer day and the lush beauty of the Russian landscape come alive. Together with Alyonushka the reader will wander in the forests, cross the seas, and fly over hills and deserts.

\* © Translation into English. Progress Publishers 1978

The heroes of these tales have much in common with those of Russian folk tales. Mamin-Sibiryak's clumsy and slow-witted bear, his mean and ever hungry wolf, his cowardly rabbit and his small bully of a sparrow, whilst retaining all of their animal traits, can and talk like human beings. Their names and nicknames are helpful in showing us what they are like. Big Long Nose, for instance, is an old and venerable mosquito, while his friend Little Long Nose is a young and inexperienced one.

Plants and objects, too, come alive in the book. Alyonushka's toys attend a birthday party and have a fight, and the flowers in her garden talk to her and tell her about themselves. In the tale "Time for Bed" the author likens pampered hothouse blooms to the overdressed children of the rich. Dearer to him by far are the modest flowers of the field and wood.

Mamin-Sibiryak sympathises with some of his heroes and makes fun of others. He writes with respect of those of them who work hard for their living and censures the loafers and lie-a-beds. He has little patience too with the arrogant and boastful who think themselves the centre of the universe and believe that everything is made solely for their convenience. In the tale "The Last of the Flies" we are told of a foolish fly that is convinced that windows are made specially for it to be able to fly in and out of the house, that a jar of jam is placed on the table so that it can eat its fill, and that the sun shines only in order to keep it warm.

What have a bird and fish in common? The writer replies to that in the tale "Quicky-Tricky the Sparrow, Handy-Dandy the Ruff and Yasha the Cheerful Chimney Sweep". The Ruff lives in the water, he explains, and the Sparrow spends most of its time in the air, but both of them suffer from the cold in winter, have any number of worries in summer, and are obliged to hunt for food the year round.

There is strength in numbers, D. Mamin-Sibiryak tells us, and he proves it in his tale "Stingy-Wingy—Long-Nose the Mosquito and Shaggy-Kaggy-Button-Tail the Bear", in which the mosquitoes, because they keep together, are able to put the bear, big and strong as he is, to flight.

Of all his books Mamin-Sibiryak liked "Tales for Alyonushka" best. "Love itself wrote it, therefore it is sure to outlive everything else I penned," he once said.

*Andrei Chernyshov*

## THE LITTLE TALE BEFORE

Rock-a-bye, little one, rock-a-bye.

One of Alyonushka's little eyes sleeps, and the other is awake; one of her little ears sleeps, and the other listens.

Sleep, Alyonushka, sleep, little beauty. Your Daddy will tell you a nice, long fairy tale.

They have all come, they all want to hear: Vaska the Cat, Stop-a-Bit the Dog, Crunch-Munch the Mouse, the Cricket on the Hearth, the bright-feathered Starling in its cage, and Petya the Cock.

Sleep, Alyonushka, the tale is just beginning.

From its seat high in the sky the new moon is peeping in at your window. A squint-





## THE BIG TALE

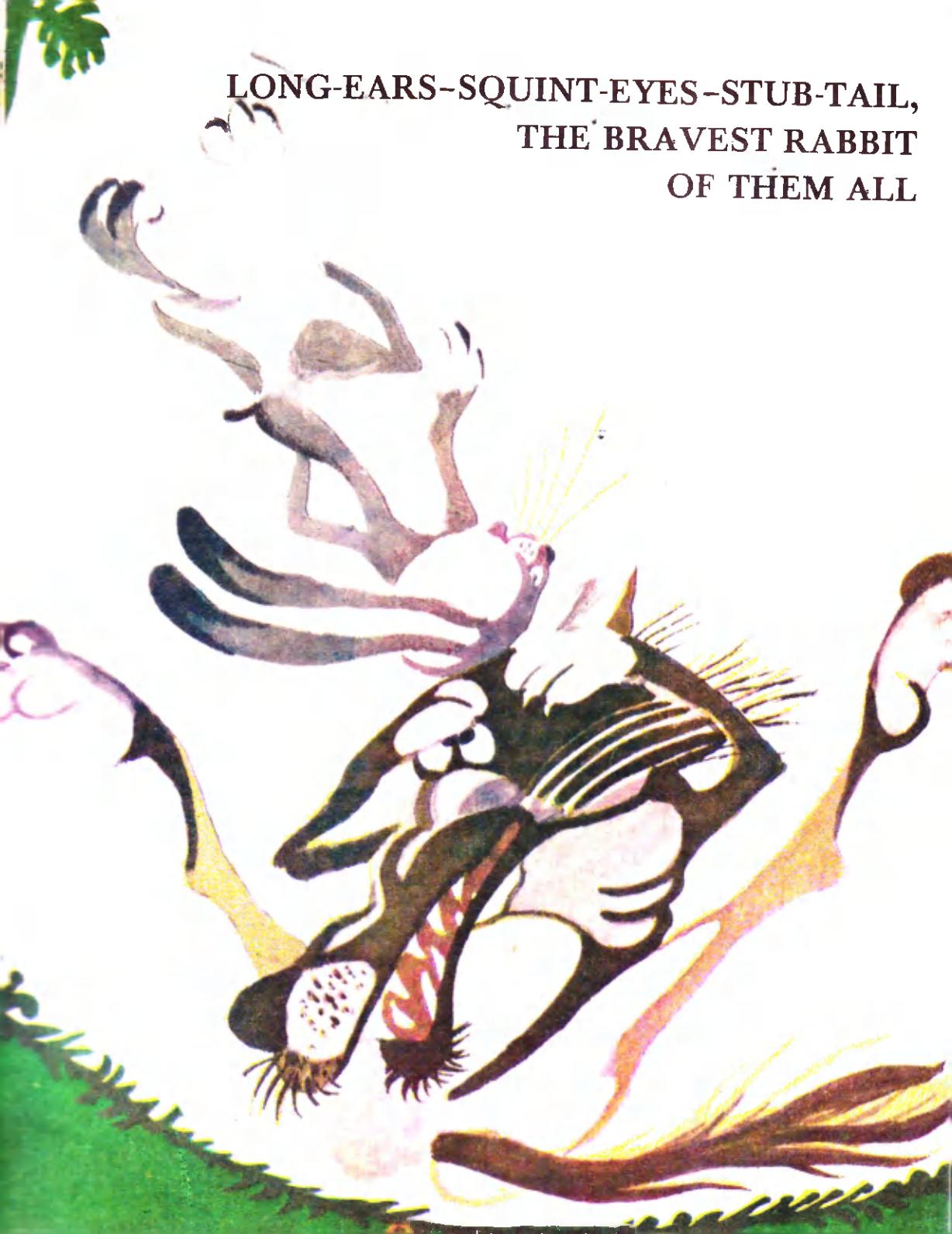
eyed rabbit has just hobbled by  
in his soft boots. The eyes of  
a grey wolf gleam like two  
yellow lights. Mishka the  
Bear sucks at his paw.  
An old sparrow has just  
flown up to the window,  
tapped at it with its  
beak, and asked how  
soon we would begin.  
They are all here,  
and they are all waiting  
for our fairy tale.

One of Alyonushka's little eyes sleeps,  
and the other is awake;  
one of her little ears  
sleeps, and the other  
listens.

Hush-a-bye, little one,  
hush-a-bye.



LONG-EARS-SQUINT-EYES-STUB-TAIL,  
THE BRAVEST RABBIT  
OF THEM ALL



I'm not afraid of anyone!



A little rabbit was once born in the forest who was afraid of everything. A twig had only to snap, a bird to flutter a wing, a clump of snow to fall from a tree, and the rabbit's heart was in his mouth.

The little rabbit was afraid for a day, he was afraid for two days, he was afraid for a week, he was afraid for a year, and then he was all grown up and quite tired of being afraid.

"I'm not afraid of anyone!" he shouted for the whole forest to hear. "Not the least bit afraid, and that's all there is to it!"

At this the old papa rabbits gathered near, and the little bunnies came running, and the old mamma rabbits trotted up. They all listened to Long-Ears—Squint-Eyes—Stub-Tail boast, they listened and they couldn't believe their ears. Never a rabbit lived who wasn't afraid of something.

"Look here, Long-Ears—Squint-Eyes—Stub-Tail, aren't you even afraid of the wolf?" someone asked.

"No, I'm not—not of the wolf, nor of the fox, nor of the bear—I'm not afraid of anyone!"

Now this was really beginning to be very funny. The young bunnies giggled, covering their fuzzy muzzles with their paws, the kindly old mamma rabbits burst out laughing, and even the old papa rabbits, who had been in a fox's paws and felt a wolf's teeth on them, smiled. For here was a funny rabbit, indeed, too funny for words, and he made them feel quite jolly.

They began to skip about and cut capers and turn somersaults and chase one another's tails just as though they had all suddenly taken leave of their senses.

"What's the use of all this talk!" Long-Ears—Squint-Eyes—Stub-Tail cried, feeling quite brave and sure of himself. "If ever I come across a wolf, why, I'll eat him up myself!"

"Oh, what a funny rabbit Long-Ears—Squint-Eyes—Stub-Tail is! What a silly rabbit!" his friends cried, and they laughed and laughed.

So there were the rabbits screaming their heads off about the wolf, and there was the wolf right beside them. He had been prowling in the forest and attending to his affairs, and he was very hungry. He was just thinking how nice it would be to have a tender

young rabbit for dinner when what did he hear but many rabbits all shouting at once and all talking about him, Grey Wolf. So he stopped and sniffed the air and began to steal up to them.

He crept quite close to the rabbits, but they were making such a racket that they never heard him. They were laughing at him, and the little braggart Long-Ears—Squint-Eyes—Stub-Tail louder than any of them.

“Hm, brother rabbit, you wait, you’re the one I’m going to eat!” said Grey Wolf to himself, and he peeped out to see which of the rabbits was boasting so loudly.

But the rabbits never saw him. They were laughing and shouting and enjoying themselves more than ever. Finally, Long-Ears—Squint-Eyes—Stub-Tail climbed up on a tree stump, sat back on his hind paws and said:

“Listen to me, you cowards! Look at me and listen. I’m going to show you something you’ve never seen before. I ... I ... I ...”

But he couldn’t bring out another word. It was as if the little braggart had swallowed his tongue. For Long-Ears—Squint-Eyes—Stub-Tail had seen Grey Wolf staring at him! The other rabbits had not seen Grey Wolf, but Long-Ears—Squint-Eyes—Stub-Tail had, and he was so frightened he could not breathe.

Then something quite remarkable happened.

Long-Ears—Squint-Eyes—Stub-Tail bounced up like a ball, and, in his fright, fell straight on to Grey Wolf’s muzzle, rolled head over heels down his back, turned a somersault in the air, and bounded away so fast that he all but jumped out of his own skin!

He ran and he ran till he could run no more. He thought Grey Wolf was at his heels and about to catch him between his teeth.

But at last the poor little braggart was so tired that he closed his eyes and dropped down in a heap under a bush.

As for Grey Wolf, he went lolling off in a different direction and never looked back. When Long-Ears—Squint-Eyes—Stub-Tail had tumbled on top of him, he had thought at first that someone had taken a shot at him. Then he had seen Long-Ears and decided that there were many rabbits in the forest and no reason in the world to

other about this one who was quite mad, as anyone could see!

It took the rabbits a long time to collect their wits. Some of them had hid behind bushes, some had ducked behind tree stumps, and some had scrambled down holes in the ground and kept very, very still.

But at last they all became tired of hiding, and those of them who were the braver of the lot began to peep out one by one from their hiding places.

"Did you see what a fright Long-Ears—Squint-Eyes—Stub-Tail gave Grey Wolf? Wasn't it wonderful of him?" they said. "If not for him we'd never have gotten away alive. Where is he, though?"

They began to look for him, they looked and they looked, but Long-Ears—Squint-Eyes—Stub-Tail was nowhere to be seen. Had another wolf eaten him up? But no, they found him at last. He was sitting in a hole under a bush, half dead with fright.

"Good for you, Long-Ears!" the rabbits all cried together. "Good for you! How you frightened that bad old wolf! You were wonderful! Thank you, Long-Ears! And we thought that you had been boasting."

Hearing them, Long-Ears—Squint-Eyes—Stub-Tail took heart at once. He climbed out of his hole, shook himself, screwed up one eye and said:

"Who, me? Boasting? Don't be funny! You little cowards!"

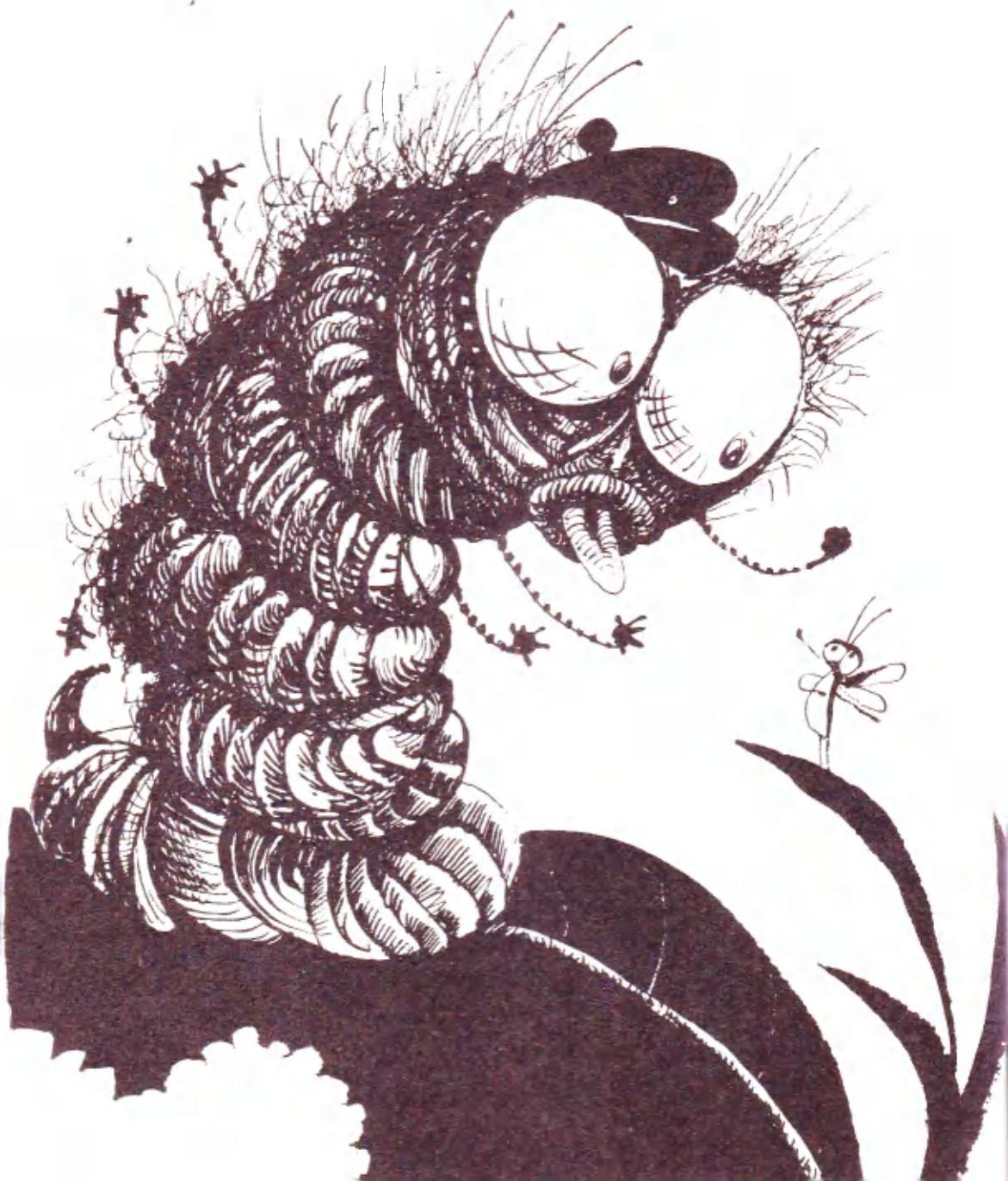
And from that day on Long-Ears—Squint-Eyes—Stub-Tail really believed that he feared nothing in all the world.



# TEENY-WEENY BUG



Everything belongs to me!



No one saw how or when Teeny-Weeny Bug was born. It happened on a sunny spring day, and Teeny-Weeny Bug looked round her and said:

"How nice!"

She spread out her wings, rubbed one thin little leg against the other, threw another look round her and said again:

"How very nice! The sun is warm, the sky is blue, the grass is green, and they all belong to me!"

Teeny-Weeny Bug rubbed one leg against the other again and rose into the air. Round and round she flew, and everything she saw delighted her. The grass below her was green as green could be and a little red flower peeked out from under it.

"Come here, Teeny-Weeny Bug!" the flower called.

Teeny-Weeny Bug alighted on the ground, climbed up the flower stalk and began sipping the sweet flower juice.

"You're awfully kind, flower!" said Teeny-Weeny Bug, wiping her face with her front legs.

"Yes, I know," the flower agreed. "But fate hasn't been kind to me. I can't walk."

"Oh, but it's an awfully jolly world all the same," said Teeny-Weeny Bug, "and it all belongs to me!"

But she had not quite finished saying what she had meant to say when a shaggy Bumblebee came flying up. He buzzed loudly as he flew and made straight for the flower.

"Buzz-buzz, who has got into my flower? Buzz-buzz, who is drinking up its sweet juice?" he called. "Oh, you nasty bug you, get out of here! Get out of here before I sting you!"

"Now, wait a minute, you can't do that!" Teeny-Weeny Bug piped. "The flower is mine!"

"No, it isn't, buzz-buzz, it's mine!" the Bumblebee cried. And

so angry did he become that all Teeny-Weeny Bug could do was to get away from him. She settled down on the grass, licked the flower juice from her legs, and, feeling ever so peeved and cross, said:

“How rude the Bumblebee is! It’s strange really.... Wanting to sting me, of all things! Why, everything I see around me is mine, the sun and the grass and the flowers.”

“No, they aren’t, they’re mine, begging your pardon,” brought out a fuzzy little Caterpillar who was crawling up a blade of grass.

But Teeny-Weeny Bug was not to be put out by a mere Caterpillar who, she saw, could not even fly, and said in bolder tones:

“I’m sorry, but you are wrong, Caterpillar, quite wrong. I won’t try to stop you from crawling wherever you please, but I really cannot have you arguing with me!”

“Oh, very well! But please don’t touch my grass, I do so hate it when anyone does. There’s no end of the likes of you flying around here. You’re a thoughtless lot, all of you, and I’m as sober-minded a Caterpillar as they come, so you can believe me when I tell you that everything here belongs to me. I’ll climb up this blade of grass and nibble off the top, and I’ll do the same to the flowers.... Good day!”

Only a few hours passed by, and Teeny-Weeny Bug knew all there was to know: that besides the sun, the sky and the grass there were bad-tempered bumblebees, sober-minded, solemn-faced caterpillars, and all sorts of thorns and nettles and other prickly things about. It was most distressing, and Teeny-Weeny Bug felt quite pained. Why, she had been certain that everything belonged to and had been made solely for her, and here were all these others thinking exactly the same about their own selves. Something was very wrong.

Teeny-Weeny Bug flew on, and what did she see but a pool of water.

"The pool is mine, all mine!" she piped gaily. "How jolly it is here, there's grass growing all around, and flowers too!"

She glanced up, and saw other little bugs flying toward her.

"Hullo there, sister!" they called.

"Hullo, my dears, I'm glad to see you. I was beginning to feel very lonely all by myself. What are you doing here?"

"We're playing games, sister, and having a wonderful time. Come and join us! Where did you drop from?"

"I was only born today. The Bumblebee nearly stung me, and then I met a Caterpillar. I thought everything belonged to me, but they said it didn't, that it belonged to them!"

The other little bugs heard out Teeny-Weeny Bug, told her that she should not let such things bother her, and invited her to play with them. The air above the water was dark with bugs. Clouds of them were spinning and whirling about there, and they were humming and singing merrily. Teeny-Weeny Bug was quite breathless with joy and soon forgot all about the bad-tempered Bumblebee and the solemn-faced Caterpillar.

"My, how jolly!" she sang out in delight. "Everything is mine: the sun and the grass and the water. I really can't understand what makes some creatures so cross. Everything belongs to me, but I don't mind these others flying about and singing and having a good time. Live and let live, I always say."

Teeny-Weeny Bug played and danced for a while, and then she settled down on a blade of sedge. It was high time she had a rest. She sat there watching the other bugs dancing and spinning about when all of a sudden who should come swooping down on them but a Sparrow. He dropped from the sky like a stone, and with loud cries of "Oh!" and "Ah!" the bugs scattered and fled.

When the Sparrow flew away, nearly a dozen bugs were found to be missing.

"The villain, to eat up a whole dozen of us!" some of the older bugs muttered.

This was far worse than the Bumblebee, and Teeny-Weeny Bug hid deep down in the swamp grass with some of her younger friends.

But new dangers awaited them there: two of them were swallowed by a fish and two others by a frog.

"What does it all mean?" Teeny-Weeny Bug wondered. "It's terrible, really terrible. Those horrid creatures!"

It was fortunate that there were so many bugs, for whenever any of them vanished it almost passed unnoticed. Besides, new little bugs who had just been born came flying up and made up for the missing ones.

"Everything belongs to us!" they piped.

"No, not everything!" Teeny-Weeny Bug told them loudly. "There are all sorts of nasty creatures in the world that grab things for themselves: bad-tempered bumblebees, and solemn-faced caterpillars, and sparrows, and frogs. So watch out, sisters!"

But by that time night had come, and all the little bugs hid amid the rushes where it was nice and warm. Stars appeared in the sky and the moon, too, and it was all mirrored in the water and very, very beautiful!

"The moon is mine and so are the stars," Teeny-Weeny Bug whispered to herself, but she did not dare say so out loud for fear that they too would be taken away from her.

### 3

Day followed day, and the summer went by. Teeny-Weeny Bug had had a lot of fun, but there had been one or two things that were not pleasant to look back on. She had twice been very nearly swallowed by a martin and once by a frog. Bugs, small ones especially, had so many enemies!

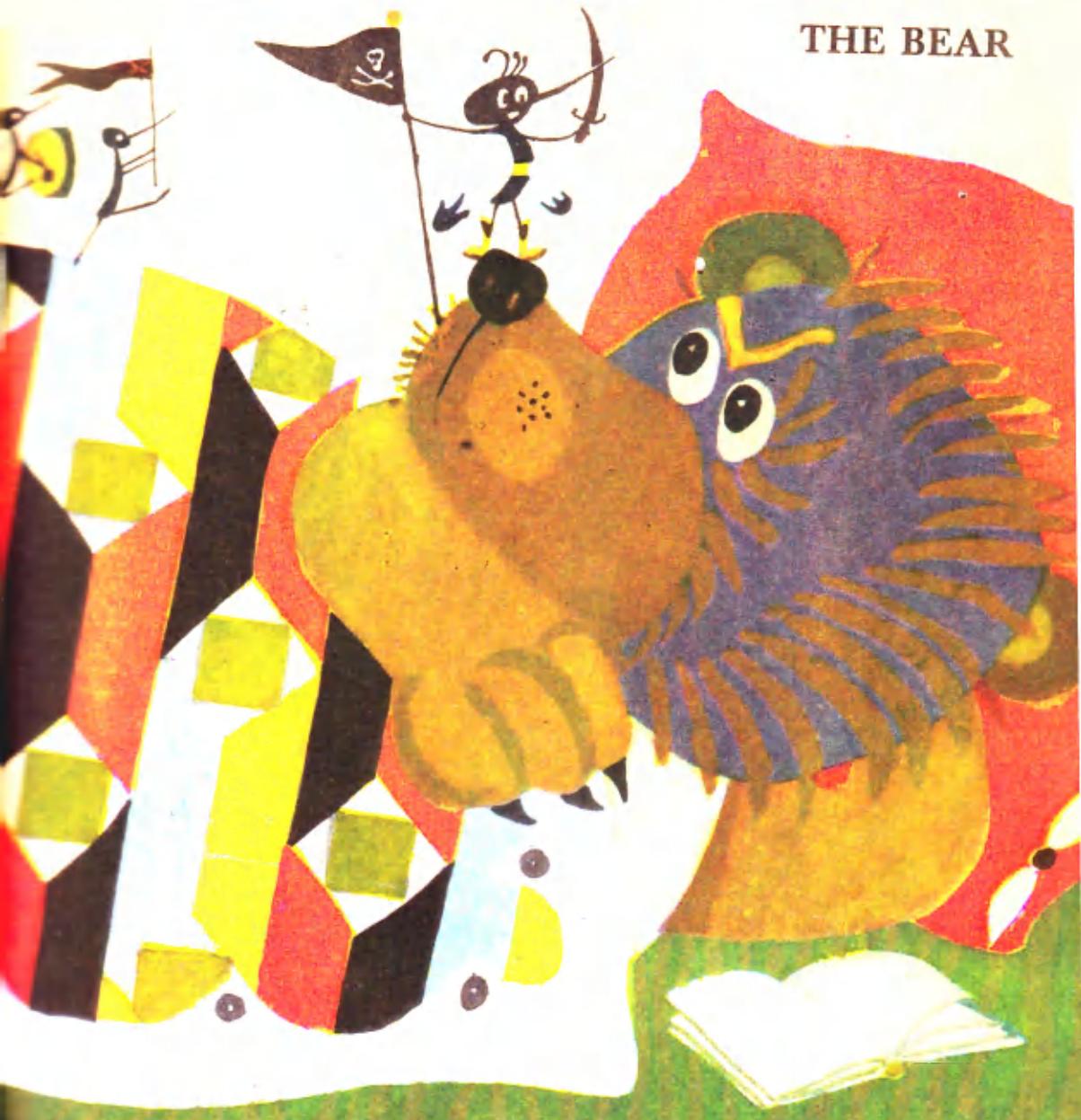
But it was the nice things Teeny-Weeny Bug liked to remember. Like the day when she met Mr. Teeny-Weeny Bug who had long, bushy whiskers and who told her that she was very pretty and asked if he might be allowed to keep her company. To this Teeny-Weeny Bug readily agreed, and the two of them settled down under a blade of grass and began keeping house together. Life was good! Wherever

went one the other went too, and they never noticed how the time passed and summer gave way to autumn with its rainy days and cold nights. Teeny-Weeny Bug laid many tiny eggs and hid them in the thick grass and, this done, felt very, very tired.

"I really must lie down and rest, I'm all in," she said. And down she lay on the ground, curled up there and went to sleep. All winter long she would sleep, but with the coming of spring, awake and live anew.



STINGY-WINGY-LONG-NOSE  
THE MOSQUITO  
AND SHAGGY-RAGGY-BUTTON-TAIL  
THE BEAR





Stop him, everyone! Stop him! He's getting away!...

It happened at noon when all the mosquitoes were hiding from the heat in the swamp. Stingy-Wingy—Long-Nose was lying under a big leaf, fast asleep. Suddenly he was awakened by a terrible cry:

“Oh! Oh! Oh! Help! Help! Help! ”

Stingy-Wingy sprang out from under his leaf and yelled:

“What’s happened? What’s this noise?”

For there were all his friends flying about and piping so loud that he could not make head or tail of it all.

“Oh! Oh! Oh! A bear is in the swamp! He came, he lay down on the grass, and he crushed five hundred of us. And then he took a deep breath and swallowed another hundred. Oh! Oh! Oh! Isn’t it terrible? If we hadn’t made off when we did, he would have crushed us all.”

This made Stingy-Wingy—Long-Nose very angry indeed—angry at the bear and angry at the foolish mosquitoes who were making all this noise.

“Stop your whining! ” he cried. “I will just go and chase the bear away. It’s easy! All this shouting isn’t doing you any good at all.”

Now, by the time he had said this, Stingy-Wingy—Long-Nose was angrier than ever. He flew to the swamp, and lo! —there was the bear lying snug as you please in the very spot where the mosquitoes had lived ever since time began. He lay sprawling on the ground in the thickest grass, and he was snuffling and wheezing and snoring so loud that it sounded just as if someone were playing on a trumpet. Now, wasn’t he a most shameless creature! To come to a place where you don’t belong, to destroy so many innocent lives and to lie sleeping there so sweetly.

“Hey, Bear, what do you think you’re doing here?” Stingy-Wingy—Long-Nose called out for the whole forest to hear, and he shook with fear at the sound of his own voice.

Shaggy-Raggy—Button-Tail the Bear opened one eye, but he saw no one. He opened his other eye, and then he could just make out a mosquito flitting about over his very nose.

“What do you want?” grumbled Shaggy-Raggy—Button-Tail, growing angrier every moment. “Here I lie down for a nice snooze, and up pops a piping little good-for-nothing to annoy me.”

“Hey, Bear, you’d better get out of here! ”

Now Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail opened up both eyes, looked hard at Stingy-Wingy—never was there a more shameless mosquito born—and gave a snort of anger.

“What do you want, you worthless creature?” he growled.

“This place belongs to us. You’d better go while the going’s good. I won’t stand for any nonsense—I’ll eat you up together with that fur coat of yours.”

Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail the Bear thought he had never heard anything so funny. He smiled, turned over on his other side, covered his muzzle with his paw and was soon snoring away again.

2

Stingy-Wingy-Long-Nose flew back to where the other mosquitoes were waiting for him.

“I gave Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail the fright of his life!” he piped, loudly enough for the whole swamp to hear. “He won’t dare come here another time.”

This surprised the mosquitoes very much indeed.

“Where’s Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail now?” they asked.

“I wouldn’t know. I’m not one to stand for any nonsense, so I told him straight out I’d eat him up if he didn’t go away at once. Ye-es. Just like that. For all I know, he might even have died of fright after I left him. Well, if that’s so, he has no one but himself to blame!”

At this all the mosquitoes began piping and buzzing and arguing about what they were to do about the bear who, they all agreed, was a terrible boor. Never before was such a noise heard in the swamp! It went on for a long, long time, and at last it was decided to chase Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail out of the swamp.

“Let him go home to the forest where he belongs and sleep there,” the mosquitoes said. “The swamp is ours. Our fathers before us and their fathers before them lived in this very same swamp.”

One sensible little old lady mosquito did say that she thought it might be better to leave the bear in peace: he would have his sleep and then go away by himself. But everyone pounced upon her in such rage that the poor old lady had to fly for her life to

get away from them.

"Come, friends, follow me!" Stingy-Wingy-Long-Nose cried, louder than anyone. "We'll show him! Oh, won't we just!"

And all the mosquitoes flew after Stingy-Wingy-Long-Nose. They flew and they buzzed and made such a din that their own hearts were in their mouths. They came to the swamp and looked, and there was Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail the Bear lying quite still in the grass.

"There! Just as I told you. The poor thing has died of fright!" boasted Stingy-Wingy-Long-Nose. "And I must say I feel rather sorry for him. Such a big, healthy bear lying there, dead!"

"He's not dead, he's asleep!" buzzed a tiny little mosquito who had flown up to Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail's very nose and been all but sucked in.

"Oh, the shameless creature!" droned the mosquitoes, the swamp ringing with their voices. "He's crushed five hundred mosquitoes and swallowed a hundred more, and he lies there sleeping just as if nothing had happened."

And Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail went on wheezing and snuffling and snoring.

"He's just pretending to be asleep!" cried Stingy-Wingy-Long-Nose, flying at Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail. "I'll show him. Hey, you there, wake up!"

And flying straight at the bear, he drove his long nose into Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail's small black one. Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail leaped up, and—bang! —he whacked himself on the nose with his paw, but of course Stingy-Wingy-Long-Nose was not there any more.

"Well, Bear, you didn't like that, did you?" Buzzed Stingy-Wingy-Long-Nose. "You'd better go, or it'll be so much the worse for you! I am Stingy-Wingy-Long-Nose the Mosquito, and I'm not alone. My grandfather Big Long-Nose and my little brother Little Long-Nose are here with me! Go away, Bear!"

"I will not go away!" roared Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail, sitting up. "I'll crush all of you to death!"

"You mustn't boast, Bear!"

And Stingy-Wingy-Long-Nose flew at Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail again and stung him in the eye. Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail

roared out in pain, and he fetched himself such a blow on the muzzle that he nearly clawed his own eye out. But Stingy-Wingy—Long-Nose got away and he hovered over Shaggy-Raggy—Button-Tail's very ear.

“I will gobble you up, Bear! ” he droned.

3

Now, by this time Shaggy-Raggy—Button-Tail was in such a rage that he pulled a whole birch tree out by its roots and swished it at the mosquitoes. He tried very hard, he struck at them again and again till he was quite out of breath, but not a single mosquito did he hit—they all went flitting and dancing about over his head and piping and buzzing for all they were worth. Then Shaggy-Raggy—Button-Tail picked up a heavy rock and threw it at the mosquitoes, but, alas, with as little result as before.

“Well, Bear, nothing doing, huh! ” buzzed Stingy-Wingy—Long-Nose. “I'll gobble you up just the same.”

A long time passed by, and Shaggy-Raggy—Button-Tail the Bear still battled with the mosquitoes. Never was there such a noise heard in the forest! Shaggy-Raggy—Button-Tail's roars carried far, far away. And he uprooted a great many trees and turned up many, many rocks. He dearly wanted to get his paws on Stingy-Wingy—Long-Nose. There he was, hovering over his very ear, yet try hard as Shaggy-Raggy—Button-Tail would, he missed every time and only scratched his own muzzle till it bled.

At last Shaggy-Raggy—Button-Tail became very, very tired. He sat back, snorted and—this was a new trick that he had thought up—began rolling over the grass, trying to crush the mosquitoes that way. He rolled over and over, but nothing came of it, and he was more tired than ever. Then he tried hiding his muzzle in the moss, but that only made things worse. The mosquitoes clung to his tail and stung him again and again till Shaggy-Raggy—Button-Tail was beside himself with rage.

“You wait, I'll get even with you! ” he roared, so loud that he could be heard five miles away. “I'll show you.... I'll ... I'll....”

The mosquitoes flew off a bit, and waited to see what would happen. And Shaggy-Raggy—Button-Tail climbed a tree as nimbly as

a circus acrobat and seated himself on its thickest branch.

"Try and reach me now," he bellowed. "Why, I'll break off your noses for you!"

But the mosquitoes only laughed in their squeaky voices, and, rushing at poor Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail, piped and buzzed and danced round him. Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail tried to drive them off and swallowed a hundred mosquitoes by accident. He had a fit of coughing and fell off the tree in a heap. But he was up again at once, he rubbed his sore side and cried:

"See how well I can jump?"

At this the mosquitoes laughed harder than ever, and Stingy-Wingy-Long-Nose piped:

"I will eat you up! I will eat you up! I will eat you up! ..."

By this time Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail was so tired he could hardly move, but to leave the swamp would have been a disgrace, so he just sat there on his hind paws, blinking and squinting.

It was a frog that came to his rescue. She hopped out from under a hummock, sat up and said:

"Why worry yourself for nothing, Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail? Don't pay any attention to these good-for-nothing mosquitoes. They're not worth it."

"You're right," said Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail happily. "I don't know why I... uh.... Just let them try and come to my lair, why, I'll... I'll...." And Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail turned tail and ran out of the swamp as fast as his legs could carry him.

Stingy-Wingy-Long-Nose flew after him. He flew and he cried:

"Stop him, everyone! Stop him! He's getting away!"

And all the mosquitoes gathered round Stingy-Wingy. They put their heads together and they thought and thought and at last they decided to let Shaggy-Raggy-Button-Tail go. For, after all, the swamp was now theirs again!



# VANKA-VSTANKA'S BIRTHDAY PARTY



Have a good time, everybody!



Pound, drum, dum-dee-dum! Blare, trumpets, ta-ra-ra! It's Vanka-Vstanka's birthday today, so strike up the band and let's have music! Welcome, all, we're having a party and we'll be glad to have you!... Dum-dum, dum-dee-dum!... Tara, ta-ra-ra!

Vanka-Vstanka is all dressed up in a bright red shirt, and he walks up and down, swaying from side to side a little, as is his wont, and says:

"Come right in, everyone! The table's all set and there's plenty of good things to eat: nice, fresh soup made of sawdust and chips, chopped steak of pebbles and sand, and for dessert, pies of paper and cardboard. Take your seats, everyone!... Where's that music again?"

Dum-dum, dum-dee-dum! Ta-ra, ta-ra-ra! ....

The room was filling fast. The first to arrive was pot-bellied Volchok the Spinning Top who whizzed in at such speed that he was quite out of breath.

"Where's the hero of the day? Where's Vanka-Vstanka?" he panted. "It's lovely to be here! I love parties."

After him came two dolls: blue-eyed Anya, whose nose was slightly chipped, and dark-eyed Katya, one of whose arms was missing. They were both very prim and polite and they sat down side by side on the toy sofa.

"I wonder if we'll get anything nice to eat," said Anya. "Vanka-Vstanka's such a braggart. The music is good, it's true, but I don't know about the food."

"You're always displeased about something, Anya," Katya said.

"And you're never one to agree with a person," Katya replied, nettled.

They went on arguing and would have quarrelled had not Clown, and a run-down, elderly creature he was, limped up just then on his one leg and made peace between them.

"Don't you worry, ladies, everything will be fine!" he said. "I'm sure we're going to have a lot of fun. Of course, my having only one

leg doesn't help, but then look at Volchok. He only has one leg too, but just watch him spin! Hullo there, Volchok!"

"Hullo! Am I seeing things or have you a black eye, Clown?"

"I have. Got it when I fell off a chair. But it's nothing. It could be worse."

"You're telling me! A lot worse. Sometimes I spin so hard that I knock my head against the wall."

"A good thing your head is empty."

"Still, it does hurt. Try it yourself some time and see."

But Clown only struck together the two brass plates he was holding and made no reply. He was a most thoughtless fellow.

Just then Petrushka or Punch, if you like to call him that, came in, bringing a whole crowd with him: his wife Matryona or Judy, if you like to call her that, Dr. Karl, a learned German doctor, and a swarthy-faced Gypsy, dragging a three-legged horse behind him.

"Well, here we are, Vanka-Vstanka!" said Petrushka gaily, giving himself a little flick on the nose. "And you won't find a better set of people anywhere. My wife alone is a match for anyone! She loves her cup of tea, by the way. Takes to water like a duck."

"She can have as many cups of water as she wants," Vanka-Vstanka replied. "I'm always glad to have you, friends. Take a seat, Matryona ... er ... Judy. Dr. Karl, make yourself at home."

The next to arrive were Teddy Bear and Bunny Rabbit, and the next after them, Woolly Goat, Yellow Duck, Red Rooster and Grey Wolf. There was room for all in Vanka-Vstanka's house!

The last arrivals were Alyonushka's Little Boot and her Little Broom. They glanced round the table, saw that there wasn't a free seat left, and sighed.

"That's all right, I can always stand in the corner," said Little Broom at last in a quiet little tone.

But Little Boot said not a word. He crawled under a sofa and stayed there. He was a most respectable boot if a little worn down at the heel. There was a hole too on his toe, not a big hole, to be sure, but one that embarrassed him, so that he was glad to be under the sofa where nobody would notice it.

"Come, let's have some music!" Vanka-Vstanka cried.

At once the drum began to beat again—dum-dee-dum!—and the trumpet to blare—ta-ra-ra!—and all the guests perked up, for they knew that they were going to have a marvellous time!

It was the gayest party ever! The drum pounded away, the trumpet blared, Volchok the Spinning Top spun and buzzed, Clown banged his brass plates, and Petrushka screeched at the top of his lungs.

"Isn't this the life!" Vanka-Vstanka called out from time to time, smoothing his flaxen locks.

Anya and Katya let out thin little peals of laughter, Teddy Bear, for all that he was so clumsy, danced with Little Broom, Woolly Goat waltzed Yellow Duck round the room, Clown turned somersaults, and Dr. Karl, who sat beside Matryona, bent over her now and again and asked: "Have you a tummy-ache, my dear?"

"Certainly not!" Matryona told him for the third time, quite vexed by now. "What makes you think so, Dr. Karl?"

"Show me your tongue, my dear."

"Leave me alone, Doctor, please!"

They were interrupted suddenly by Silver Spoon's strange little tinkling voice.

"If you want me, I'm here!" Silver Spoon piped.

It was the very spoon Alyonushka used every morning to eat her porridge with, and it had been lying quietly on the table all the time. But when Dr. Karl mentioned the word tongue up it jumped. For wasn't it called upon to help whenever Alyonushka's doctor asked to see her tongue?

"Don't, please don't!" Matryona squeaked, waving her hands in the funniest way in front of her face.

"You needn't do that, I know when I'm not wanted," Silver Spoon said.

She felt unhappy and cross and would have given vent to her

feelings had not Spinning Top whizzed up to her just then and invited her to dance. Spinning Top buzzed and Silver Spoon tinkled, and, watching them waltz round the room, Little Boot crawled out from under the sofa and whispered in Little Broom's ear: "I love you, Little Broom."

Little Broom closed her eyes and sighed. She adored being made much of. But she was modest and never gave herself airs like Matryona and Anya and Katya did. The three dolls, nice as they were, enjoyed nothing so much as finding fault with and poking fun at their friends. Clown, they said, was ugly because he had only one leg, Petrushka, because his nose was too long, Dr. Karl, because he had a bald spot on his head, and Gypsy, because he was as dark as a piece of charred wood. But it was Vanka-Vstanka they laughed at most.

"Vanka-Vstanka's such a boor!" Katya said.

"Yes, and a braggart too," Anya added.

The music stopped, and the dancers sat down at the table again and began feasting in earnest. It was a proper birthday dinner and went off very well except for a few minor incidents, Teddy Bear nearly eating up Bunny Rabbit instead of his steak, Spinning Top and Gypsy having a fight over Silver Spoon, whom Gypsy had slipped into his pocket, and Petrushka, that well-known tease and bully, quarrelling with his wife. After a while Matryona was looking as though she would have a fit, and Dr. Karl felt he had to do something about it.

"Calm yourself, Matryona," he said. "You know Petrushka didn't mean it, he's a kind fellow at heart. But perhaps you have a headache? I have a pill with me that will make it pass in no time."

"Leave her alone, Doctor," Petrushka said. "The woman is impossible. Not that I don't love her, I do, very much. How about a kiss, Matryona?"

"Hurrah!" Vanka-Vstanka cried. "That's much better. I hate it when people quarrel. Look there—"

But at that moment something quite unexpected and terrible happened. The drum began to beat—dum-dum, dum-dee-dum! The

trumpets blared—ta-ra, ta-ra-ra! Clown's brass plates jangled and clanged, Silver Spoon tinkled, Spinning Top buzzed, Bunny Rabbit shouted and laughed, Porcelain Dog on the mantle barked, Rubber Cat seated beside it, miaowed, Teddy Bear stamped his foot so hard that the floor boards danced, and Woolly Goat pranced about, shook his beard in the funniest way and bleated.

3

Now, how did all this come to pass? A natural question, but one not easy to answer because none of those who were to blame for the rumpus could later recall much about it.

But let us try to at least get the order of events right. First, Vanka-Vstanka's wooden bricks came to wish him many happy returns of the day. No, no, we're off on the wrong track again. The bricks did come, but it wasn't they who started it all, it was dark-eyed Katya. Just as they were finishing dinner, what did the sly little thing do but whisper to Anya: "Tell me, Anya, who do you think is the handsomest man here?"

Matryona overheard her and became terribly upset, for some reason.

"So you think Petrushka is ugly?" she asked her.

"I never said that, Matryona," Katya said.

But Matryona was not to be stopped so easily.

"Of course, his nose is a little too big," she went on, "but then you would not say so unless you saw him in profile. And I know you don't like that bad habit he has of screeching at the top of his voice and bullying everyone. But he is a kind man at heart. Clever too. There is no one here as clever as he."

The three dolls now began arguing so heatedly that everyone looked at them, and Petrushka, naturally enough, could not let it pass without saying something.

"You're right, Matryona!" he screeched. "I am the handsomest man here!"

The others were very hurt. What a braggart Petrushka was! Why, it made one sick to listen to him! Clown was not much of a talker, so he pulled a long face and said nothing, but Dr. Karl called out very loudly: "If you are, then the rest of us are monsters."

This started a terrible hullabaloo, Gypsy shouting something no one could understand, Teddy Bear roaring, Grey Wolf howling, Woolly Goat bleating, and Spinning Top buzzing. They had all got their backs up.

"Stop it, everyone!" Vanka-Vstanka cried. "Pay no attention to Petrushka! He was only joking."

But this did not help, for they were all much too aroused to stop, Dr. Karl more than anyone. He banged on the table with his fist and shouted: "A fine party, I must say! I do believe we were only invited here to be insulted."

"Please, ladies and gentlemen, please!" Vanka-Vstanka cried, trying to outshout them all. "There's only one person here who's ugly, and that's me! Now are you satisfied?"

But no one heard him. Dr. Karl flew off the handle completely and turned on Petrushka.

"If I weren't a man of education and didn't know how to behave myself in polite society," he said, waving a threatening finger at him, "I would tell you that you are a blockhead, Petrushka!"

At this, Vanka-Vstanka, who knew what a bully Petrushka was, rushed to stand between him and the Doctor, but in so doing accidentally brushed against Petrushka's nose. Petrushka, thinking that it was the Doctor who had done it, lost his temper and pounced on him. Gypsy, who had been sitting apart from the rest, went at Clown with his fists, Teddy Bear fell, roaring, upon Grey Wolf, and Spinning Top struck Woolly Goat again and again with his empty head. It was a most scandalous scene, and the two dolls, Anya and Katya, gave a little squeal of fright and fainted dead away. Matryona followed suit, crying as she toppled down from the sofa: "I think I'm going to be ill!"

"Stop it! Stop it!" Vanka-Vstanka roared. "It's my birthday, don't forget. Can't you be more polite, ladies and gentlemen?"

By then it was a free-for-all, and it would have been hard to say who was fighting who. Vanka-Vstanka tried without success to part the combatants, but ended up by pummelling all who came to hand, and as he was stronger than anyone, his friends fared badly.

"Help! Help!" Petrushka yelled, trying to hit Dr. Karl as hard as he could. "Murder!... Help!"

Of the whole company only Little Boot and Bunny Rabbit got away unhurt. And only because they crawled under the sofa in time. Little Boot crawled under it first, and Bunny Rabbit came after him and hid behind his back.

"Where do you think you're going?" Little Boot muttered.

"Hush or they'll hear and then we'll both catch it!" Bunny Rabbit said, one eye glued to the hole in Little Boot's toe.

"What a terror that Petrushka is! Pummelling everyone and screaming blue murder at the same time. A fine thing! And that Wolf. I only got away from him by the skin of my teeth. Just to think of it makes my blood run cold. And they've killed poor Duck. Look at her stretched out there with her toes turned up."

"Don't be silly, Bunny Rabbit. The dolls are lying in a swoon, so Duck is too. She has to keep up with them, hasn't she?"

The toys went on fighting, and, for all anyone knows, would never have stopped had not Vanka-Vstanka finally pushed them all out of the room, all, that is, but the three dolls. Of these, Matryona was the first to find her tongue. She was sick and tired of lying in a swoon and she opened one eye and asked:

"Where am I? Come and see if I'm alive or not, Doctor!" There was no reply, so Matryona opened her other eye. The room was empty save for Anya and Katya who were still lying on the floor, and Vanka-Vstanka, who was standing in a daze in the middle of the room.

Anya and Katya came to by and by, and they too stared round them in astonishment.

"Oh, it was awful, awful!" Katya said. "I never saw such a birthday party in my life!"

And she and the other two dolls demanded that Vanka-Vstanka

explain to them what had happened. But this he found hard to do.

"I'm sure I don't know what we were fighting about," he said, spreading his hands out helplessly. "I like my friends, I like them all very much."

"We can tell you all about it," Little Boot and Bunny Rabbit called out from under the sofa. "We saw it all!"

"That's right, and it's you two who are to blame for everything!" Matryona cried. "Yes, you!... You started it all and then went and hid yourselves."

"They started it! They started it!" Anya and Katya cried with one voice.

"Oh, so that's it!" Vanka-Vstanka said, pleased that the culprits had at last been found. "Get out of here, you nasty things! To come to a person's birthday party and start a quarrel. It's ... it's just too bad for words!"

He waved his hands wildly and would have given Little Boot and Bunny Rabbit a trouncing had they not seen what he was up to and jumped out of the window in time.

"I'll give it to you yet, you just wait!" Matryona cried, shaking her fist. But she could have spared herself the trouble, for they were out of the house by then.

"What horrid people there are in the world, I'm sure Duck here thinks so too," she said.

"Yes indeed!" Duck hurried to agree. "I saw them crawl under the sofa with my own eyes."

Duck always agreed with everyone.

"Let's get the others to come back," Katya said. "Then we can all enjoy ourselves!"

The guests were now sent for and returned willingly. Some had black eyes, others were limping, and it was Petrushka who had come off best, with only his nose slightly bruised.

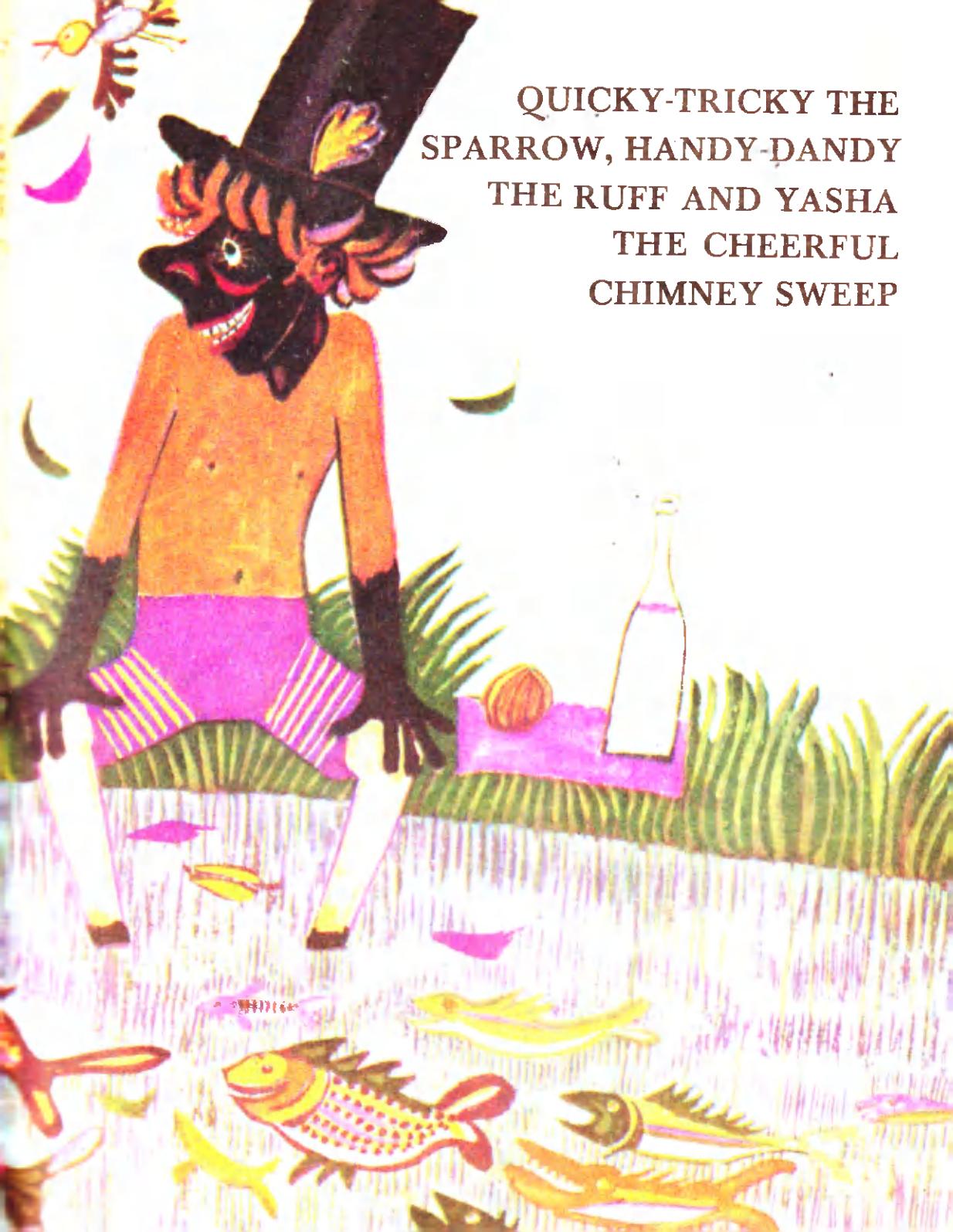
When they heard that it was Bunny Rabbit and Little Boot who had started the fighting, they were all properly angry and indignant.

"The nasty things!" they kept repeating. "Who would have thought it!"

"I'm so tired!" Vanka-Vstanka wailed. "I hurt my hands pummelling the lot of you. But let bygones be bygones, I'm not one to harbour ill feelings for long. Come on, strike up the band!"

At this the drum began to beat—dum-dum, dum-dee-dum!—and the trumpets to blare—ta-ra, ta-ra-ra!—and Petrushka yelled, drowning out the sound of them: "Three cheers for Vanka-Vstanka!"





QUICKY-TRICKY THE  
SPARROW, HANDY-DANDY  
THE RUFF AND YASHA  
THE CHEERFUL  
CHIMNEY SWEEP



It's so funny!



Quicky-Tricky the Sparrow and Handy-Dandy the Ruff, were great friends. Every summer day Quicky-Tricky would fly to the river to speak to his friend.

"Hullo there, Handy-Dandy!" he would call. "How are you?"

"Fine! Doing nicely," came Handy-Dandy's reply. "Come and pay me a visit. It's really very jolly here, the river's so deep and cool and quiet. There's the water plants, more than anyone could wish for. And I'll treat you to some delicious frog eggs and worms and water bugs."

"Thank you so much, Handy-Dandy! I'd be glad to come, but I'm afraid of the water. Why don't you fly up to the roof and pay me a visit yourself? I'll give you some of my berries, I have a whole garden of them, and then we might be able to get us a crust of bread and a few oats and a bit of sugar and a mosquito. You do like sugar, don't you?"

"What does it look like?"

"Well, it's white and comes in little pieces for one thing—"

"Is it like the pebbles in the river?"

"Yes, only you can't eat pebbles, whereas sugar is sweet and melts in your mouth. Let's fly up to the roof now, shall we?"

"No, I can't fly, and I can't breathe when I'm out of the water. You'd better come swimming with me. I'll take you all over the river."

Quicky-Tricky would go into the water, he'd wade in up to his knees, but he would go no farther. He didn't in the least want to drown. He would just take a drink of the clean river water and on hot days splash around in a shallow spot, and then he'd clean his feathers and go back to his roof again. But he and Handy-Dandy were good friends just the same and liked to talk about all sorts of things.

"Don't you ever get tired of being in the water?" Quicky-Tricky wondered. "It's wet, you might catch cold."

But Handy-Dandy could not understand his friend's way of life any more than Quicky-Tricky could his.

"Don't you ever get tired of flying, Quicky-Tricky?" he would ask. "It's so hot in the sun, I don't see how you can breathe. Now, the river's always cool, and you can swim all you want. Why, just everyone goes bathing in the river in summer. But catch anyone going up to your roof!"

"Oh, but they do, Handy-Dandy, they do! There's Yasha the Chimney Sweep. He's a very good friend of mine and comes to see me often. He's such a cheerful fellow, too, always singing or humming. Does that even while sweeping the chimneys. And sometimes he sits down for a rest on the very top of the roof and takes out a piece of bread and eats it while I pick up the crumbs. We love being together, Yasha and I. I'm a cheerful fellow myself."

There was much in common between Quicky-Tricky and Handy-Dandy. Even their troubles were much the same. Winter was one. How raw the days sometimes were, and how cold poor Quicky-Tricky was! It got so cold his heart nearly froze out of him. Quicky-Tricky would ruffle his feathers, tuck his legs in under him and sit there very quietly. He could only get warm by wriggling into a chimney and sitting there, pressed close to its wall. But this was dangerous. Once Quicky-Tricky nearly came to grief, and all because of his good friend Yasha.

Quicky-Tricky was snuggling in a chimney when Yasha came and dropped his brush and iron weight into it, nearly cracking Quicky-Tricky's skull open. Out jumped Quicky-Tricky, all covered with soot and as black as a chimney sweep himself. He was in a terrible huff.

"What do you think you're doing, Yasha?" he said, very crossly. "Why, you might have killed me!"

"How could I tell you were in the chimney!" Yasha replied. "You'd better be careful from now on. I might have hit you with the weight, and that would not have been nice at all, would it?"

Now, Handy-Dandy the Ruff wasn't having an easy time of it in winter, either. He would slip into some deep pool and sleep for days and days. It was dark and cold there, and Handy-Dandy would stay without moving for hours. He would only swim out to the ice hole in

the rare moments when Quicky-Tricky came for a drink of water and called to him.

"Hullo there! Are you all right?" he would call.

"I'm all right," Handy-Dandy would call back in a sleepy voice, "only I'm sleepy all the time. Winter's hateful. Everyone here is asleep."

"It's the same with us, Handy-Dandy. Oh, well, it can't be helped! But how bitter the wind can be! There's no sleeping when it blows. I keep hopping on one foot to get warm. And people see me and say: 'Look what a cheerful little sparrow it is!' Ah, if only it would get warm soon! Are you asleep again, Handy-Dandy?"

But summer brought troubles of its own. A hawk once flew after Quicky-Tricky for over a mile and only gave up the chase when Quicky-Tricky hid in the sedge growing by the river.

"I only got away by the skin of my teeth," Quicky-Tricky said to Handy-Dandy afterwards, gasping for breath. "The villain! Had he caught me, it would have been the end of me."

"He sounds like the pike in our river," Handy-Dandy said, trying to comfort his friend. "She nearly caught me, too, a few days ago. Went after me like lightning. I was out swimming with some of my friends and thought that was a log floating in the water, when suddenly the log rushed after me. Why do pikes exist at all! I just can't understand it."

"Neither can I. You know, I think the hawk must once have been a pike, and the pike a hawk. Cutthroats both of them."

And so that was how the two friends lived: they shivered in winter and were happy in summer. And Yasha the Cheerful Chimney Sweep swept chimneys and sang songs. Each of them had his own joys and his own troubles.

One summer day, Yasha, who had been hard at work sweeping a chimney, went to the river to wash off the soot. He was walking

along and whistling a gay tune when suddenly he heard the most fearful noise. He was wondering what it was when he saw flocks of birds circling over the river—there were ducks there and geese, and swallows, and snipe, and crows, and pigeons. They were screeching, and calling, and laughing, and Yasha could not make out what it was all about.

“Hullo there! What’s happened?” he called to them.

“Something has, you may be sure!” a pert little titmouse chirped up. “It’s so funny! Look at Quicky-Tricky over there. I do believe he’s taken leave of his senses.” And the titmouse gave a little laugh in its squeaky little voice, whisked its tail and soared high up over the river.

When Yasha came to the river bank Quicky-Tricky fairly rushed at him. He looked very fierce—his beak was wide open, his eyes burned like two coals and all his feathers stood on end.

“Come, now, Quicky-Tricky, what are you making such a noise for?” Yasha asked him.

“I’ll show him, I’ll show Handy-Dandy!” Quicky-Tricky screeched, nearly choking with rage. “He doesn’t know me. I’ll show him! I’ll give the rascal something to remember me by.”

“Don’t listen to him!” Handy-Dandy called to Yasha from the water. “He’s lying!”

“What? I’m lying, am I?” Quicky-Tricky screamed. “Who found the worm, tell me that? I’m lying, huh? Such a nice, fat worm, too! I dug him up on the bank, and don’t think it was easy, either. But I got him finally and was dragging him off to my nest. I have a family, and they’ve got to be fed. Well, I had just flown up over the river when Handy-Dandy, may a pike swallow him, called loud as anything: ‘A hawk!’ I screamed, the worm fell into the water, and Handy-Dandy got him. I’m lying, am I? There was no hawk anywhere in sight. He had made it up on purpose, to trick me.”

“I was only joking,” Handy-Dandy said, trying to justify himself. “As for the worm, it was very good, I must say.”

By then many fish of all kinds, roaches and carps and perches, had gathered round Handy-Dandy. They listened to him and they

laughed and laughed. Handy-Dandy had played a fine trick on his old friend! But it was funnier still to see Quicky-Tricky trying to fight him. He flew at him from this side and that, but there was nothing he could do.

"I hope Handy-Dandy chokes on my worm!" Quicky-Tricky shouted. "I'll dig up another one for myself. But it really is too bad that he has the nerve to laugh at me now, after cheating me out of my worm. To think that I used to invite him to my roof for a visit. A fine friend he turned out to be! Yasha will agree with me, I know. He and I are good friends, we even take our meals together now and then. He eats, and I pick up the crumbs."

"Just a moment, friends. Let's talk it over," Yasha said. "Let me wash up first, and then I'll see who's right and who's wrong. Meanwhile, Quicky-Tricky, try to calm down a bit."

"But I *am* calm, I haven't done anything wrong!" Quicky-Tricky shrieked. "I'll show Handy-Dandy how to play tricks on me! I'll teach him!"

Yasha the Chimney Sweep sat down on the bank, placed the small package with his dinner beside him on a rock, washed his hands and face and said:

"Well, friends, now we'll see who's right. You, Handy-Dandy, are a fish, and you, Quicky-Tricky, a bird. Right?"

"Yes, yes!" the birds and the fishes cried.

"Well, then, let's go on. A fish lives in the water, and a bird in the air. Right? And a worm lives in the ground. Good. Now look!"

Yasha unwrapped his package. There was only a piece of rye bread in it, and that was his whole dinner. He put the bread on the rock and said:

"Look! Do you know what that is? Bread. I worked and earned it and I'll be the one to eat it. I'll eat it, and then I'll have some water. And no one will be the loser. Now, if birds and fishes want their dinners, they must work to earn them. What's the good of quarrelling? Quicky-Tricky dug up the worm, and that means it's his."

"Just a minute, Yasha," a tiny little voice piped. The birds

moved aside and made way for a small sandpiper who hopped up to Yasha on his spindly little legs.

“It’s not true, Yasha,” he chirped.

“What’s not true?”

“It was I who found the worm. Ask the ducks—they saw me. I found it, and Quicky-Tricky flew up and grabbed it.”

Yasha was taken aback.

“How can that be?” he muttered. “Have you really been lying to us all along, Quicky-Tricky?”

“No, I haven’t. The sandpiper’s lying. And he got the ducks to back him up.”

“I don’t think you’re being honest. Of course one little worm isn’t much, but it’s wrong to steal. Stealing leads to lying. Don’t you think so?”

“Yes! Yes!” they all cried again. “And it’s for you to say, Yasha, which of them is right—Handy-Dandy or Quicky-Tricky. They were the ones that started this. They screamed and fought and roused everyone!”

“Which of them is right? Neither is. You’re mischief-makers both, you, Handy-Dandy, and you, Quicky-Tricky. You are indeed. I’m going to punish both of you, just to teach you a lesson. Shake hands and make up at once, do you hear?”

“Yes! Yes!” the fishes and birds cried. “Let them make up!”

“As for the little sandpiper, who worked so hard to get the worm, I’ll give him some bread crumbs to make him feel better,” Yasha went on. “That should please everyone.”

“Yes! Yes!” they all cried again.

Yasha reached for the bread, he looked, but there was no bread there! While they had all been so busy talking, Quicky-Tricky had snatched it up and flown off with it.

“The robber! The cheat!” the fishes and birds cried angrily.

And they all went after the thief. The piece of bread was thick and heavy, and Quicky-Tricky could not fly very far with it. He was caught just over the river, and the big and little birds all pecked at him at once. It was an awful scramble. The birds pulled so hard at

the bread that crumbs of it kept dropping into the water, and the piece, or what was left of it, followed. The fish rushed after it. Soon the piece of bread was all crumbs, and they pounced on these and ate them up. So finally nothing was left of the bread at all.

As for Yasha the Cheerful Chimney Sweep, he sat on the bank, watching, and he laughed and laughed. It was really very funny, if you came to think of it. All the birds had flown away, and there was no one beside him now but the sandpiper.

“Why don’t you fly after the rest?” Yasha asked him.

“I would if I weren’t so small. Why, the big birds might peck me to death.”

“Well, that’s the way things are, little sandpiper. We’re both left without our dinner. Didn’t work hard enough for it, I suppose.”

It was just about then that Alyonushka came to the river. She asked Yasha the Chimney Sweep to tell her what had happened, and, when he did, laughed as hard as he.

“Oh, how silly the fishes and birds are!” she cried. “I’d have divided the worm and the bread equally among everyone, and then there’d be nothing to quarrel about. Why, just the other day Daddy brought me four apples and told me to divide them among Liza and him and me. And I did. I divided them into three parts. I gave one apple to Daddy, another to Liza, and took two for myself.”

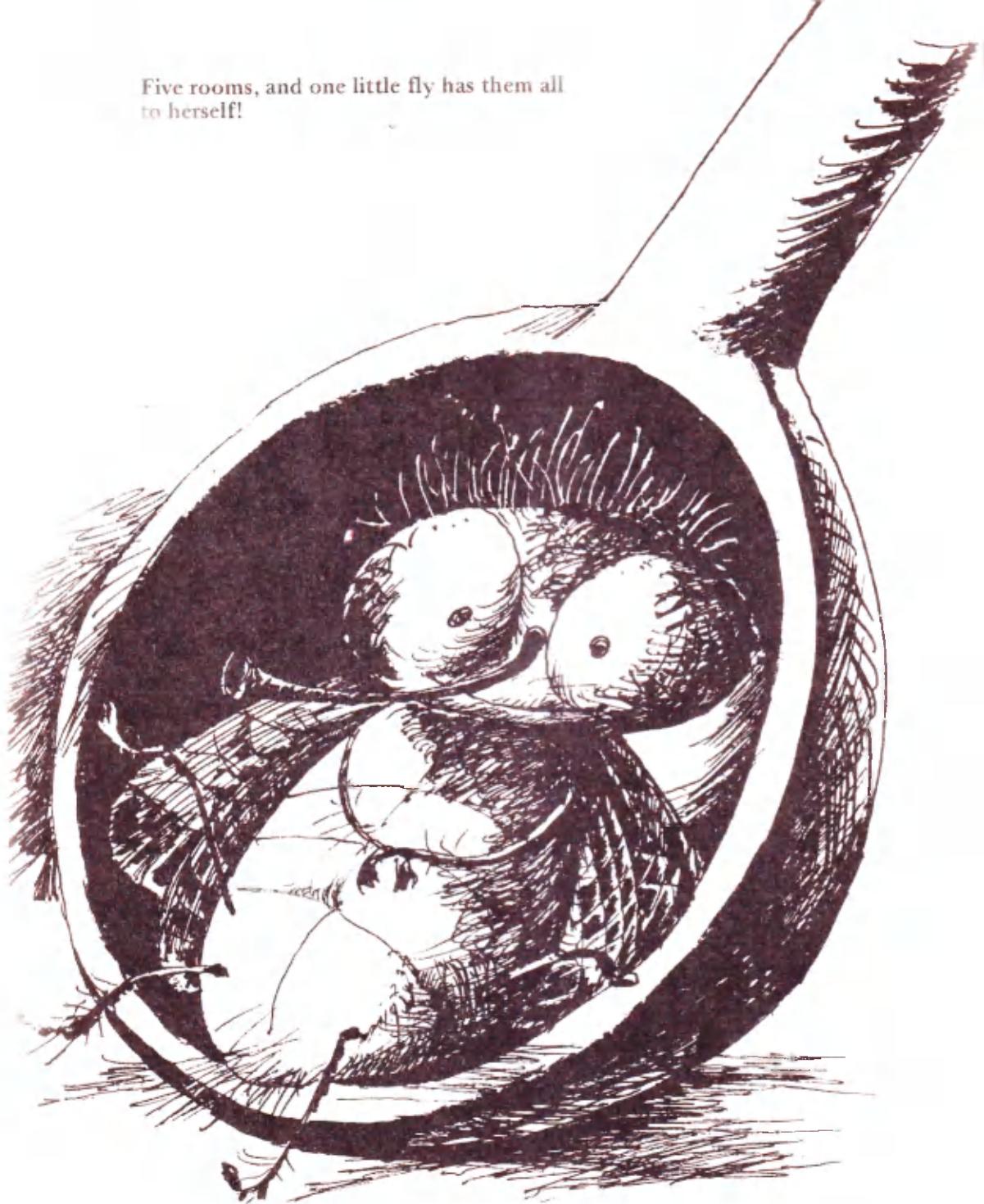




## THE LAST OF THE FLIES



Five rooms, and one little fly has them all  
to herself!



What fun summer was! It was perfectly lovely! So many nice things happened that to put them down in the order they did isn't at all easy.

There were thousands of flies everywhere. They flew round and round, buzzed for all they were worth and had a wonderful time! When Little Fly was born and spread out her wings, she felt as gay and as happy as any of them. The best of it was that all the terrace doors and windows stood open from early in the morning, and you could fly into the house through whichever you chose.

"What kind creatures people are!" Little Fly said to herself as she flew in through one window and out of another. "They make windows specially for us flies, and they keep them open for us too. It's great fun!"

She flew into the house and out again into the garden about a thousand times, and she sat on the garden grass and admired the lilac bushes, the flower beds and the tender little leaves on the lime tree. The gardener, someone she had just come to know of, had cared for and tended them, long before she was born. He was very kind-hearted. He had made ready everything, positively everything a little fly needed. This was all the more surprising because he himself did not know how to fly and sometimes even found difficulty in walking. He would sway and lurch on his feet and mutter something that Little Fly could not always understand.

"Where do all these cursed flies come from?" he would say.

The poor man could only have said such things out of envy, for he himself had never learned to fly and could do nothing but dig flower beds and plant and water flowers. Little Fly would sometimes spin over his rather red nose on purpose and, without knowing it, annoy him terribly.

People were very kind. Why otherwise would they be doing all they could to give the flies a little pleasure! Take Alyonushka now. She would have milk and a bun every morning and then beg Aunt Olga for a piece of sugar, she so wanted the flies to have some sugar! And what can be tastier than a drop of milk and a bit of sugar,

especially when you've been out all morning and worked up an appetite!

Pasha, the cook, was even kinder than Alyonushka. She went shopping every morning and brought back the tastiest things specially for the flies—meat and fish and butter and cream. She could not fly any more than the gardener could, but she knew exactly what the flies liked.

And as for Aunt Olga, she was wonderful! She simply lived for the flies. She would open the windows every morning with her own hands to let them in, and if it rained or was chilly, she would shut them so they wouldn't wet their wings and catch cold. She noticed too that the flies loved sugar and berries, so what she did one morning was to put some sugar and berries in a pan and make the loveliest jam. What's more, she went on doing it day after day. The flies knew very well who she was doing it for and would get into the pan to show their gratitude. Alyonushka loved jam too, but Aunt Olga would only give her a spoonful or two at a time and leave the rest for the flies. There was a lot of jam, and the flies could not have eaten it up all at once, so Aunt Olga put most of it in glass jars to keep the mice from getting at it and then let the flies have some every day when she had her tea.

"How nice people are!" Little Fly sang out as she flew from window to window. "It's a good thing they can't fly, though. For if they could, they would turn into flies, large, greedy flies, and eat up everything!"

Life was good, she told herself, and things were just the way they should be!

"People are not as kindhearted as you think," an Old Fly, who was always grumbling, said. "It only seems so to you. Do you know the man everyone calls 'papa'?"

"I do. Yes, you're absolutely right, he's very strange. Always smoking a pipe when he knows very well that I can't bear tobacco smoke! I do believe he does it out of spite. And he positively refuses to do anything for us flies. I once tried a bit of the ink he uses for writing, and I nearly died. It's outrageous! Then there was the

time—and I saw it all with my own eyes—when two of the prettiest young flies, who didn't know any better, of course, drowned in his inkwell. He pulled out one of them with his pen later. A gruesome sight. And who did he blame? Not himself but us! Now, I ask you, is that fair?"

"This 'papa' of theirs is anything but just," the Old Fly said. "But there's one thing I'll say to his credit, and that is that he has beer regularly after dinner. Very nice of him! I admit I like my beer too even though my head sometimes swims after I've had some. It's a bad habit, but what can you do if you've got into it!"

"I like beer too," Little Fly confessed, blushing a little. "It puts me in good spirits even if my head sometimes aches afterwards. Papa never eats jam, have you noticed? He has nothing but sugar with his tea. And what good can be expected of a man who never touches jam? Nothing remains for him but to smoke a pipe."

The flies knew the habits of everyone who lived in the house and had taken the measure of each.

## 2

It was a hot summer, and with every passing day there were more and more flies. They fell into the milk and the soup and got into the inkwell and they spun about and buzzed and made a great nuisance of themselves. Little Fly was quite grown up by then and had met with a number of near fatal accidents. The first time, she had got stuck in the jam and had only freed herself with the greatest difficulty; the second time, she had flown while only half-awake straight into a burning lamp and had nearly had her wings scorched, and the third time, she had climbed in between two window panes and had found it hard to climb out again. All sorts of unpleasant things kept happening to her.

"It's terrible, these flies won't let one live!" the cook complained. "It's as if they were mad the way they get into everything. We must get rid of them."

Even Little Fly herself was beginning to think that there were too many flies about, especially in the kitchen. In the evening the ceiling seemed to move so closely was it covered with them. And when any food was brought in, the flies flung themselves at it in swarms, pushed and jostled one another and quarrelled noisily. The strongest and most brazen of them got the best pieces, and the rest had to make do with the leavings. Pasha was right.

Then something terrible happened. One morning, Pasha brought in sheets of paper. These she laid out on plates, and, sprinkling them with sugar, poured warm water over them. They were delicious!

“A treat for the flies!” said Pasha, setting the plates out where they could best be seen.

She need not have said that, for the flies knew the moment they set eyes on them who the sheets were meant for and pounced on them happily. Little Fly too made for one of the plates, but was rather roughly pushed aside by a bigger fly.

“Why must you push so, ladies and gentlemen?” she said, offended. “I’m not so greedy as to take things away from others. It isn’t nice.”

But what came next was too horrible for words. The least sensible of the flies, who in their greed had got at the paper first, were the first to suffer. They wandered about as if drunk for a time and then dropped dead. The following morning Pasha swept out a whole plateful of them. Only the more sensible of the flies, Little Fly among them, remained alive.

“We don’t want any paper, no matter how good it is!” they piped.

But on the next day the same thing happened again, and of the sensible flies only the most sensible were left. Pasha, however, found that even of these there were far too many.

“They won’t let a body alone!” she complained.

Then the gentleman who was called ‘papa’ brought three very handsome bell-glasses, poured beer into them and placed them on plates. This time even the most sensible of the flies fell for the bait. The bell-glasses, as it turned out, were nothing but traps. Attracted by

the smell of beer, the flies flew into them and, unable to get out again, perished.

“Good! Very good!” Pasha said approvingly. She was, as it turned out, a heartless woman who rejoiced in others’ misfortune. Judge for yourselves. Had people had wings, like flies, and had fly traps as big as houses been set up, they would have been caught in them in just this same way. So what was good about it? Little Fly, who had profited from the bitter experience of the most sensible of her friends, lost all faith in people. They only seemed kind, people did, but they weren’t really; for, as anyone could see, they actually enjoyed tricking the poor, trusting flies. If the truth be known, there was no more cruel and cunning animal than man.

By now the number of flies had decreased considerably. But as if this were not enough there was further trouble to come. Summer passed, the rains set in, a cold wind began to blow, and the weather became quite nasty.

“Has summer passed already?” the few surviving flies asked, surprised. “Now, when did it have time to do that? It’s quite unfair. Here’s autumn upon us before ever we knew it.”

This was worse than any poisoned paper or glass traps. So bad was the weather that the flies were forced to turn to their bitterest enemies for protection: Alas! No longer now did the windows stand open for days on end. Instead, they were only opened a crack now and then. And the sun itself seemed to shine for the sole purpose of tricking the flies. It would glance in through the windows invitingly every morning, making one think that summer was back again, but when the flies flew gaily out they soon found that its rays, though bright, were not at all warm. But by that time the windows would be closed, and there was no way of getting back into the house. Many, very many flies lost their lives in this manner, just through having been over-trusting.

“I don’t trust anyone,” Little Fly said. “Not anyone. If the sun tricks one like this, then whom is one to believe!”

You can easily see therefore why all the flies were in the worst of spirits with the coming of fall. Their very natures changed for the

worse. Not a trace was left of their former cheerfulness. They turned dull, discontented and moody, and some even went so far as to bite people, something that had never been known to happen before.

Little Fly changed so that she could hardly recognise her own self. She, who used to feel sorry for every luckless fly that was injured or killed, now only thought of herself. She would have been ashamed to voice her thoughts, for what she was thinking was: "Let them die! There'll be more food left for me if they do." If there was any excuse for such callousness it was, first, that there weren't very many places where a good, respectable fly could pass the winter, and, second, that Little Fly was by now sick and tired of those of her kind who kept pushing in everywhere, snatching the best bits from under her nose, and, in general, behaving most unceremoniously. One needed a rest from them.

It was as if these other flies had divined her evil thoughts, for they died or, if one is to be more accurate, fell asleep by the hundreds. There were fewer and fewer of them about every day, and there was no more need for poisoned paper or glass traps. But even this was not enough for Little Fly who longed to be left all alone. Just think—five rooms, and one little fly to have them all to herself. Oh, it would be lovely!

### 3

There finally came a day when Little Fly had her wish. On that day she rose rather late, but instead of sitting listlessly in her favourite place under the stove, as she had been accustomed to doing for a long time now, for she was no longer her old sprightly self, she flew straight to the window. She had a feeling that something out-of-the-ordinary had happened. And so it had. The earth outside was white, quite white, just as if it was covered with a soft white blanket.

"Winter's here!" Little Fly told herself. "Yes, and that must be snow. It's as white as sugar."

Then, looking round her, she saw that there were no other flies

about: they had vanished, all of them. Unable to bear the cold, the poor things had dropped down and fallen asleep. At another time Little Fly might have felt sorry for them, but now she thought: "Good! Very good! I'm all alone now and no one's going to eat up my jam or my sugar or my bread crumbs."

She flew all about the five rooms and made sure that there was not another fly there. Now she could do whatever she chose. How nice it was in the house! It was winter outside, but inside it was cosy and warm, especially in the evenings when the oil lamps and candles were lit.

When this was done the first time Little Fly nearly came to grief, for she flew straight for the flame and just missed being burnt to death.

"That must be a winter trap set up for us flies," she told herself, rubbing her scorched legs. "But I'm not one to be taken in by such things. I understand perfectly. They mean to burn *me*, the last of the flies. But I have no wish to be burnt and I won't be."

Little Fly was very happy, but her happiness was short-lived and soon gave way to boredom. Of course, she was warm and had enough to eat, but, oh, how bored she was, so bored she felt she would die! She would fly about for a little while and then rest and eat and fly about again, and she would be more bored than ever before.

"I'm too bored for words!" she piped in her thin, pitiful little voice as she flew from room to room. "I wish there was another little fly for me to pass the time with, even if it was the scrubbiest and meanest of little flies!"

But complain of boredom as she would, no one, as Little Fly soon saw, seemed to care. Of course, this only made her angrier and drove her to annoy and pester the people in the house more and more. She would settle on the nose of one or the ear of another or just spin and fly wildly about in front of their eyes. It was as if she had taken leave of her senses and was quite, quite mad!

"Oh, dear, why can't you understand that I'm all alone and very bored?" she would ask them. "You can't even fly, so you don't know the meaning of boredom. I wish one of you would play with

me. But no, you couldn't! You're far too clumsy and slow. People are the most awkward creatures I have ever seen!"

Little Fly made a terrible nuisance of herself. Even the cat and the dog were sick and tired of her. But nothing angered her so much as Aunt Olga saying: "That's the last of the flies, so don't touch it, let it live through the winter."

This was carrying things too far. They were insulting her. Didn't she count with them at all? "Let it live!" Did they think they were doing her a favour? What if she was bored, what if she didn't want to live!

Little Fly was so angry by now that it almost scared her. She flew round and round and she buzzed as loudly as she could. Watching her, the spider, who usually sat quietly in the corner, said in pitying tones:

"Come and pay me a visit, Little Fly. See how pretty my cobweb is!"

"No, thank you!" Little Fly replied. "And please don't pretend to be a friend of mine. I know just what your cobweb is meant for. You are as cruel as any of the people here."

"Have it your way, I meant no harm," the spider said.

"Catch me believing that! Wanted to eat me, more likely than not. You are hateful, spider, hateful!"

They shouted and yelled at each other and quarrelled bitterly, but after it was over Little Fly was as bored as ever. And this so infuriated her that she said loudly, addressing the people in the house:

"Since you refuse to understand how bored I am, I'm going to sit and sulk in a corner all winter long! Yes, I'll sit there and nothing will make me come out!"

Then she recalled the past summer and how enjoyable it had been and began to cry. There had been so many flies about then and they had had such fun together! And she had wanted to be rid of them, to be alone. What a dreadful mistake that was!

Winter went on and on and seemed not to have an end, and Little Fly began to think that summer would never come again. She wanted

nothing so much as to die, and wept quietly, telling herself that it must have been people who had thought up winter, because people thought up all the things that were bad for flies. It could even have been Aunt Olga. Mightn't she have hidden summer away just as she had sugar and jam!

Little Fly, who was a little fly no longer, nearly died of despair. But one day something quite unexpected happened. She was sitting hunched up in her corner, feeling very forlorn and miserable, as usual, when she suddenly heard a low buzzing coming from somewhere very near. She could not believe her own ears at first and thought someone was playing a trick on her. But then—oh, dear, it couldn't be!—a fly flew past her, a real little fly who was only just born and was very cheerful and gay!

“Spring is here! Spring is here!” it buzzed.

How glad the two flies were to see each other! They embraced and kissed and even rubbed noses. It took Little Fly a whole day to tell her young friend how boring winter had been and how bad she had felt. But the new Little Fly only laughed in her thin little voice and could not understand what being bored and lonely meant.

“Spring is here! Spring is here!” she kept saying over and over again.

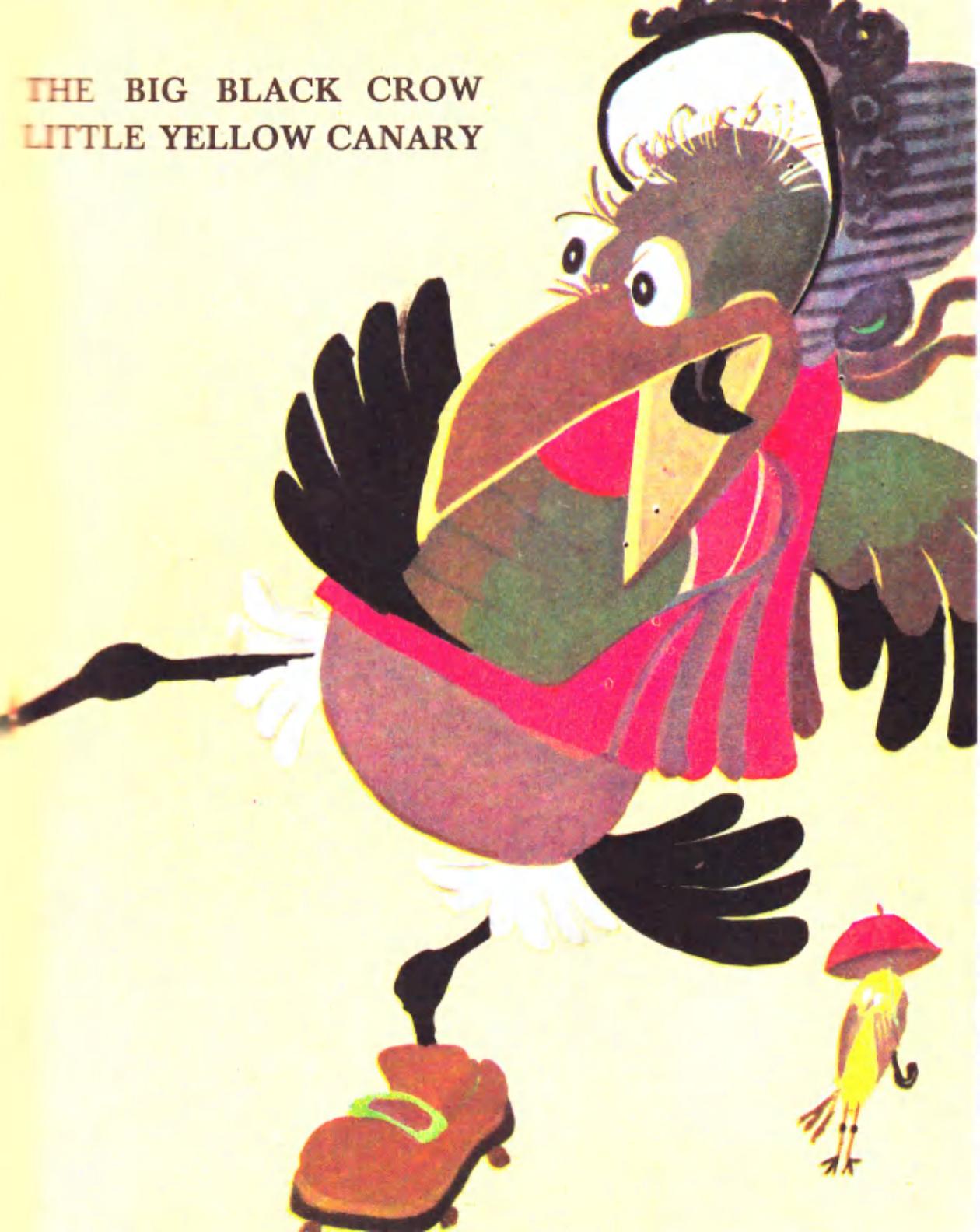
Then Aunt Olga came in and had the double panes that were put in for the winter taken out. She opened the windows, and when Alyonushka glanced out of one of them, Little Fly suddenly knew what she had not known before.

“It is us flies that make summer!” she cried happily, and out she flew into the garden.

BLACKIE  
AND GOLDIE THE



THE BIG BLACK CROW  
LITTLE YELLOW CANARY



That's what I call real singing!



One day Blackie, the Big Black Crow, was sitting in a birch tree and tapping at a twig with her beak: tap-tap! She cleaned her beak and she threw a look round her and cawed:

“Caw! Caw!”

Vaska the Cat, who had been dozing on the fence, nearly fell to the ground in fright.

“What a croaker you are, Blackie!” grumbled Vaska. “I don’t believe there’s another like you anywhere in the world. What are you so pleased about?”

“Oh, leave me alone, Vaska! I’m busy, can’t you see! So terribly busy! Caw-caw-caw! I have so many things to do.”

“Poor Blackie, you must be all tired out!” laughed Vaska.

“Be still, lazybones! All you do is lie in the sun all day toasting your sides! As for me, I don’t have a moment’s rest from the time I get up in the morning. Why, just today I sat on ten different rooftops, and I flew all over town and looked into all the nooks and crannies. And I still have to fly to the bell tower and visit the market and dig in the vegetable gardens. And, oh, dear, what can I be thinking of, wasting my time talking to you—I’m much too busy!”

And with these words Blackie gave the twig a last tap with her beak and ruffled her feathers. She was about to take wing when she heard the most terrible outcry, and a flock of sparrows came flying past her at a rush, in pursuit of some little yellow bird.

“Stop that bird, fellows! Stop it!” piped the sparrows.

“What’s the matter? Where are you going?” cried Blackie, hastening after them.

She flapped her wings once, and then again, and lo! —she had caught up with them.

The little yellow bird was very tired, and it darted into a little garden where grew lilacs and currants and bird cherries. It slipped under a bush to hide from the sparrows, but there was Blackie right on top of it.

“Who are you?” Blackie cawed.

And the sparrows rained down upon the bush like a handful of peas.

They were as cross as cross could be and dearly wanted to peck the little yellow bird to death.

"What's it done to make you so angry?" Blackie asked of them.

"Can't you see? It's yellow!" the sparrows all chirped together.

Blackie looked at the little bird—indeed, the sparrows were right, it was all yellow—and she tossed her head and said:

"You little rascals! Why, that's not a bird at all. Who ever heard of a bird that looked like that! Shoo! I don't want to see you here another minute. I want to have a talk with this strange creature here. It's only pretending to be a bird."

At this the sparrows were angrier than ever. They twittered and chirped and made an awful racket, but there was nothing to be done. They knew that Blackie would stand for no nonsense—one thrust of her beak, and it would be all over with one of them.

When the sparrows were gone, Blackie turned to the little yellow bird. The poor little thing was gasping for breath, and it looked at Blackie pitifully with its little black eyes.

"Who are you?" Blackie asked for the second time.

"A canary."

"Don't try to fool me or you'll be sorry. If I hadn't been here, the sparrows would have pecked you to death."

"I'm a canary, really I am."

"Where do you come from?"

"Well, I used to live in a cage. I was born in a cage and grew up in a cage and I lived in a cage all my life. But I did so want to fly about like other birds! My cage stood on the window-sill, and I used to watch them. They were so cheerful and gay, and my cage was so small. Then one day Alyonushka brought me some water. She opened the door of the cage, and I flew out. First I flew around the room and then out through the window!"

"What did you do in the cage?"

"I sang. I sing quite well."

"Sing something, then."

The canary trilled a little song, and Blackie cocked her head and said in surprise:

"You call that singing? Ha-ha! Your owners were foolish indeed if they fed you for singing like that. Couldn't they choose a better bird to keep, a real one—one like me, for instance? Why, just a short while ago I gave such a caw that that old rogue Vaska nearly fell off the fence in fright. That is what I call real singing!"

"Oh, I know Vaska. A terrible beast if there ever was one! He used to steal up to my cage many times. His eyes are green, and they glitter, and when he shows his claws.... Ugh!"

"He may seem terrible to some, but not to me. He's a bit of a rascal, true, but there's nothing so terrible about him. However, we'll discuss that later. I still can't believe that you're a real bird."

"Oh, but I am, Blackie dear, I really am. All canaries are birds."

"Very well, we'll see. But how are you going to live?"

"Oh, I don't need much. A few seeds, a bit of sugar, a rusk, and I'm as full as I can be."

"My, my, what a grand lady you are! Well, you'll just have to learn to do without sugar, but I dare say you'll be able to find yourself a few seeds. You know, I'm beginning to like you. Do you want to live with me? I have a lovely nest in a birch tree."

"Thank you. But the sparrows—"

"If you live with me, no one will dare lay a finger on you. Not just the sparrows, but even Vaska is afraid of me. I won't stand for any nonsense, you know."

At this, Goldie, for that was the little canary's name, brightened up at once, and she flew off together with Blackie. Goldie was very pleased with her new home. Now, if only she could find a rusk and a bit of sugar!

So Blackie the Big Black Crow and Goldie the Little Yellow Canary began to keep house together.

Blackie liked to grumble now and then, but she was not a mean bird. Her greatest fault was that she was always jealous of someone and felt that the world was against her.

"Are those foolish chickens any better than me? Certainly not. Yet they're fed and cared for and protected," she complained to

Goldie. "And the pigeons—what good are they? They're as foolish as the chickens, but they, too, get their handful of oats now and then. But as soon as I fly near, I'm driven away. Is that fair? And you should hear the bad names they call me! Haven't you noticed, Goldie, that I'm better and more beautiful than most birds? I don't think it's nice to say such things about your own self, but then I'm forced to. Don't you agree?"

Goldie agreed with everything.

"Yes, you are a big bird," she would say.

"That's just it. They keep parrots in cages and take such good care of them, but is a parrot better than me? Certainly not. It's just a silly bird. All it does is mumble and screech, but no one can make out what it says. Don't you agree?"

"I do indeed. There was a parrot where I lived before, and he was an awful nuisance."

"There are many birds that don't even know why they were born. Take the starlings, for instance. They rush up like mad from no one knows where, spend the summer here, and fly off again. Swallows are like that, too, and tomtits, and nightingales. None of them are any good. There isn't a bird among them that has any sense. The first chilly day that comes they're off to follow their noses!"

Actually, Blackie and Goldie did not understand each other at all. To Goldie living in freedom seemed as strange and unnatural as to Blackie living in a cage.

"Is it possible, Blackie dear, that no one ever gave you a crumb?" Goldie wondered. "Not one little crumb?"

"Don't be silly. Crumbs indeed! I must always be on my guard lest someone throw a stick at me, or a stone. People are very cruel."

Goldie did not believe her. And, indeed, how could she—hadn't people always been kind to her?

But she soon had a chance to see for herself that Blackie had good grounds for saying what she had.

One day Blackie was perched on a fence when a heavy stone whizzed by her head. Some schoolboys coming along the street had seen her and of course they just had to throw a stone at her!

"There, you've seen them," said Blackie, flying back and settling on the roof again. "They're all like that. People, I mean."

"Perhaps you did something to annoy them, Blackie?"

"Certainly not. They're just naturally mean. They all hate me."

Goldie felt very sorry for poor Blackie whom no one loved, no one in the whole big world. Her lot was hard indeed.

Birds had so many enemies. Vaska the Cat was one. His eyes glittered as he watched the birds, but he pretended to be asleep. Goldie once saw him catch a baby sparrow. There was a crunch of bones, a small shower of feathers, and that was the end of the poor little thing. Oh, how frightening it had been! And the hawks were just as bad. A hawk had a way of wheeling high in the sky, and then dropping down like a stone on some careless bird. Goldie once saw a hawk carry off a chick, and it had been a most terrible sight!

As for Blackie, she feared neither cats nor hawks, but—O horror of horrors!—she sometimes dined on a small bird herself. Goldie would not believe it till she saw it happen with her own eyes.

One day she saw a whole flock of sparrows come flying after Blackie. They were chirping and cheeping and making an awful racket. Goldie was frightened and hid in Blackie's nest.

"Give him back! Give him back!" screamed the sparrows angrily, flying over the nest. "It's piracy, that's what it is!"

Blackie darted into the nest, and Goldie was terrified to see a dead sparrow in her claws.

"What are you doing, Blackie?" she cried.

"Hush!" Blackie hissed.

Her eyes gleamed savagely, and it frightened Goldie who closed her own eyes so as not to see Blackie gobbling up the poor little sparrow.

"Why, she might eat me up, too, one of these days," thought Goldie.

But Blackie always became much kinder after a meal. She would clean her beak and settle down on a branch for a nap.

Goldie noticed that Blackie was very greedy and didn't care what she ate. She might bring home a crust of bread or a piece of rotting

meat or, perhaps, some scraps that she had found in a garbage heap. Indeed, digging in a garbage heap was Blackie's favourite pastime, something Goldie could never understand. Not that anyone could blame Blackie. Twenty canaries could live on less food than she had to have in a day. Food was Blackie's biggest worry. She spent hours perched on a rooftop, looking out for any food that might come her way.

When Blackie was too lazy to hunt for her own food, she used cunning. Seeing the sparrows pecking away at something, she would at once rush over. She would pretend that she was just flying by there and cry at the top of her voice: "Dear me, I'm so-o busy! So ter-r-ribly busy!"

Then she would swoop down, snatch up the food and be off again in a flash.

"It isn't nice to take food away from others, Blackie," Goldie once said.

"Oh, isn't it! But what if I'm always hungry?"

"Others are hungry, too."

"Well, that's their worry. It's only mollycoddles like you that get fed in cages, but the rest of us have got to fend for ourselves. Besides, a small creature like yourself or a sparrow can get along on so little. A crumb or two, and you're full for the rest of the day."

The summer was over before they knew it. The sun was colder and the days were shorter. The rains set in, and a cold wind began to blow. Goldie felt miserable, especially when it rained. But Blackie seemed not to mind.

"Well, what if it *is* raining?" she would say with a shrug. "It's sure to stop some time."

"Oh, but it's so cold, Blackie! So hor-ribly cold!"

The nights were the worst. Goldie could not get dry and shivered with the cold. This made Blackie cross.

"I've never seen such a mollycoddle!" she would say. "What are you going to do when the frost sets in and it starts snowing?"

Blackie was outraged. What sort of bird was this if she was afraid of the rain and the wind and the cold? What was the use of her living

at all? She began to doubt again now if Goldie was really a bird.

"I'm a bird, Blackie, honestly I am," Goldie said, with tears in her eyes. "It's just that I get so cold at times."

"Oh, well, if you say so! But I really can't help doubting it."

"No, no, Blackie, you must believe me."

Sometimes Goldie would brood over her fate and think that it might perhaps have been wiser to have stayed in her cage. It had been warm there and she had had plenty of food. She even flew up to the window where her cage stood, once or twice. There were two new canaries in the cage, and she envied them.

"I'm so cold!" twittered Goldie, shivering all over. "I wish I could get into the cage!"

One morning Goldie peeped out of Blackie's nest and was struck by what she saw. Snow had fallen during the night, and it now lay over the ground like a blanket. Everything was white as far as the eye could see. But, most terrible of all, the seeds and crumbs that Goldie ate every day were now buried under the snow. Rowan berries were all that was left, but they were too sour for Goldie. Yet Blackie seemed to like them. She would peck at them and say: "M-m, they're good!"

Goldie went without food for two days, and she was filled with despair at the end of them. What would become of her? She might starve to death. She sat in the nest and was very sad. All of a sudden she saw the very same schoolboys that had thrown a stone at Blackie run into the garden. They spread a net over the snow, sprinkled some flaxseed on it and ran away again.

Goldie was overjoyed.

"Why, those boys aren't bad at all, Blackie," she cried, looking at the net. "They have brought me some food!"

"Oh, have they! Fine food, indeed!" cawed Blackie. "Don't you dare go near it, Goldie. You'll be caught in the net the minute you start pecking those seeds."

"And what'll happen then?"

"They'll put you in a cage again."

After that Goldie was silent. She could not decide what she

should do. She was very hungry, but she did not want to be put in a cage. True, cold and hunger were no joke, but to be free was ever so much better, especially when it wasn't raining.

Goldie held out for several days, but she was so hungry at the end of them that she could no longer resist the flaxseeds and was caught in the net.

"Oh, oh! Help!" she cried, very miserable now. "I'll never do it again. I'd rather die of hunger than be put in a cage!"

Nothing in the whole world now seemed so nice to Goldie as Blackie's nest. Of course, she had been cold and hungry there at times, but she had been free! She could fly wherever she wanted. And Goldie began to cry. Any moment now the boys would come and put her in a cage.

But Goldie was lucky, for just then Blackie came flying near and saw her.

"You silly bird!" grumbled Blackie. "I told you not to touch the seeds!"

"I'll never do it again, Blackie."

So Blackie tore the thin net with her beak and set Goldie free. She had come in the nick of time, for there were the boys hurrying over to get their catch. They were very angry with Blackie and chased her, pelting her with sticks and stones and calling her all the bad names they could think of.

"Oh, how lovely it is here!" Goldie chirped when she was back in the nest again.

"Yes, it is! And see that you behave yourself from now on!" Blackie warned.

And so Goldie settled down in Blackie's nest again, and she never complained of being hungry or cold any more.

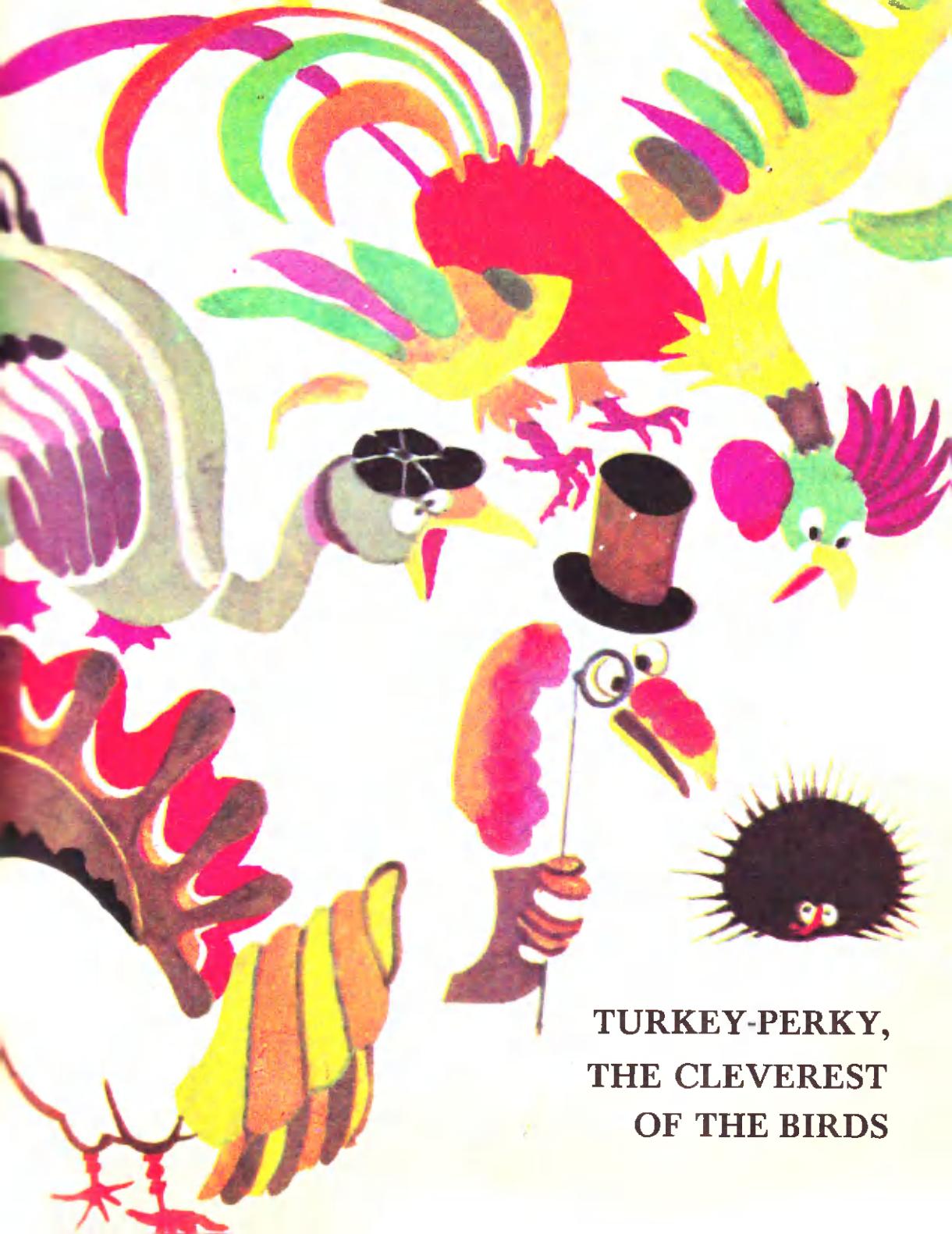
One day Blackie flew off to hunt for food, and she spent the night in a field. When she came back she found Goldie lying on her back in the nest, with her legs sticking up in the air. She was quite dead.

Blackie cocked her head and took one look.

"I always knew she wasn't a real bird!" she said.







**TURKEY-PERKY,  
THE CLEVEREST  
OF THE BIRDS**

I'm more clever than anyone, don't you think!



One morning, Mr. Turkey-Perky woke up earlier than anyone, as usual, when it was still dark, and roused his wife.

"There's no one more clever than I in all the world, don't you think?" he asked.

Mrs. Turkey-Perky, who was only half awake, coughed and cleared her throat.

"You're awfully clever, my dear, hack-hack!" she said. "Everyone knows you are, hack-hack!"

"No, you must tell me straight that I'm cleverer than anyone. There are plenty of clever birds about, but I am the cleverest of them all."

"Yes, indeed, hack-hack!" Mrs. Turkey-Perky agreed. "You are the cleverest of them all."

"There, that's better."

Mr. Turkey-Perky thought for a moment and, still looking rather sulky, added, loudly enough for the other birds to hear: "You know, I don't believe I get the respect I deserve. Indeed, I don't."

"It only seems so to you, hack-hack!" Mrs. Turkey-Perky said, trying to comfort him the while she smoothed out her feathers that had been ruffled during the night. "Really, my dear, I can't think of any bird cleverer than you, hack-hack-hack!"

Mr. Turkey-Perky seemed not to have heard her.

"Take Mr. Gander now," he went on. "Not that he says anything, he doesn't, he keeps mum most of the time. But I feel that he has no proper respect for me."

"You mustn't pay any attention to him. I suppose you've noticed that he's rather foolish?"

"Certainly, everyone has. It's written all over his face. Still it isn't he so much who bothers me, for how can one be mad at anyone so foolish, but Mr. Rooster. Did you hear what he said about me the other day? At the top of his voice, too, so the neighbours could hear. He called me a blockhead or something like that."

"*You are strange!*" said Mrs. Turkey-Perky, surprised. "Don't you know what made him do it?"

"No, what?"

"It's very simple, hack-hack, and isn't a secret to anyone in this poultry yard. It's just that both of you are roosters, only he is the ordinary, common kind, and you are a blue blood, with your roots overseas. So he says what he does out of envy. Much as they'd like to, there isn't a bird here who can boast of as fine a family as yours, hack-hack-hack!"

"True, true! Not a one. But the nerve of him! A common little rooster, and he thinks he can compare himself to me. Ha! No, my good fellow, it won't work! Not everyone can be a turkey cock."

Mrs. Turkey-Perky was a modest and kindly bird and it upset her dreadfully that her husband was always quarrelling with someone. Here he was only just up from bed and already trying to find someone to pick a quarrel with. Not that he was mean or spiteful, he wasn't, but, oh, so restless and impatient! Mrs. Turkey-Perky felt a little hurt when some of the other birds laughed at Mr. Turkey-Perky for putting on airs and called him a windbag. Of course, they did have some grounds for it, but then was there a bird anywhere, male or female, that had no shortcomings? No, there wasn't. That was why it gave one a pleasant feeling to find some fault, however small, in another.

All of the birds were now up and awake and had poured out of the hen-house into the yard and raised a terrible hullabaloo there. It was the chickens who made more noise than anyone. They rushed all over, and, thrusting themselves in at the kitchen window, yelled at the top of their voices: "Cluck-cluck, cluck-cluck-cluck, we're hungry! Has Cook dropped dead that she doesn't come out and give us something to eat? Does she mean to starve us to death, cluck-cluck?"

"Have patience, ladies! Have patience, gentlemen!" Mr. Gander, standing primly on one leg, said. "Look at me. I'm as hungry as any of you, but I don't yell or scream. Why, if I were to raise my voice and cry honk-honk--like this--it wouldn't be very nice, would it?"

And he honked again and again so loudly that Matryona, the Cook, was startled awake and jumped up from bed.

"It's easy enough for Mr. Gander to speak of patience," grumbled a lady duck. "If I had a throat like a trumpet and a neck so long and a bill so strong I'd be preaching patience too. I'd have stuffed myself quicker than anyone and then told the others to be patient. I know just what patience like his is worth."

Mr. Rooster nodded his head approvingly.

"You're quite right, Mrs. Duck," he said. "Mr. Gander only speaks of patience. Who was it but he that pulled two of the best feathers out of my tail yesterday! Most unfair I call it to catch one by the tail. We had this little tiff between us, and I won't deny it, I meant to peck Mr. Gander's head right through. But even if I had that intention, surely it was I and not my tail that was to blame. Don't you think so, everybody?"

The birds were hungry and it was because of that that they became noisy and quarrelsome. When people are hungry they behave no better.

Mr. Turkey-Perky was much too proud a bird to go rushing for his food with the others. He would wait for Matryona to chase away some of the most greedy of his friends and would only approach her when she called him.

On the morning I am telling you about Mr. Turkey-Perky strolled up and down by the fence and, while waiting for Matryona to call him, pretended to be looking for something amid the litter scattered there.

"I'm so hungry!" Mrs. Turkey-Perky complained as she strutted behind her husband. "Cook, I see, has brought out some oats as well as the remains of yesterday's porridge. And I do love porridge! I could live on porridge alone for the rest of my days. I sometimes

even dream of it at night."

Mrs. Turkey-Perky always complained when she was hungry, and she wanted her husband to show her some sympathy. With her perpetual stoop, her cough and her laboured gait, for she walked as if her legs had only been attached to her body that morning, she looked like no one so much as a little old woman.

"I wouldn't mind having some porridge, either," Mr. Turkey-Perky said. "But a clever bird will never rush for his food. Cook knows very well that if she doesn't feed me I'll die of hunger, and where'll she find as fine a turkey as me!"

"Nowhere. There is no turkey to match you anywhere."

"Exactly. As for the porridge, that's only a small matter. It's Cook we must think about and not porridge. As long as Cook is here we'll have porridge and oats and millet and bread crumbs. Everything depends on Cook alone."

Despite these words and others like them, Mr. Turkey-Perky was getting hungrier and hungrier, and when all the other birds had been fed, and Cook had still not called him, he felt quite sad. What if she had forgotten about him? That would be most unfortunate.

But the next moment, seeing a young hen, who had been taking a walk near the shed, suddenly stop dead in her tracks and hearing her clucking loudly, Mr. Turkey-Perky forgot all about his hunger. The other hens had heard her too and had taken up the cry. They were cackling and screeching at the top of their voices, and Mr. Rooster was calling louder than anyone: "Cock-a-doodle-do! What have you found there?"

Mr. Turkey-Perky hurried toward the young hen, the other birds following, and what did they see lying in a hollow by the shed but a little grey ball bristling with long, sharp needles.

"It's only a stone," said one of the birds.

"No, it isn't," the young hen that had been the first on the scene said. "I thought it was a stone too, at first, but when I came up close I saw it move! Besides, I believe the thing has eyes, and everyone knows that stones have none."

"Are you sure it has eyes? A young hen like yourself can

imagine all sorts of things when she's frightened," Mr. Turkey-Perky brought out. "Perhaps it's only a ... er..."

"It's a mushroom!" Mr. Gander cried, interrupting him. "I've seen mushrooms just like it, only without the needles."

This made them all laugh.

"It looks more like a hat to me," one of the birds ventured, but was laughed at in its turn.

"Since when have hats had eyes?" asked Mrs. Duck.

"All this talk won't help us," Mr. Rooster interrupted. "We must not talk, we must act. Hey, there, prickly, speak up and tell us who you are! I'm not one for jokes, you hear?"

No reply was forthcoming, so Mr. Rooster gave a little hop and pounced on his offender, but after pecking at him once or twice, moved away, embarrassed.

"It's ... it's nothing but a thistle," he said. "A huge thistle. And it's not at all tasty. Would anyone else like a try?"

This started a new uproar, everyone joining in and saying whatever came into their heads. Mr. Turkey-Perky alone was silent and would hazard no guesses. Let the others wag their tongues all they liked, he would not join them, not he. The hubbub went on for a long time, the birds yelling and arguing till one of them cried:

"Wait, everybody, why should we cudgel our brains when we have Mr. Turkey-Perky among us! He can tell us what it is, he knows everything."

"I most certainly do," Mr. Turkey-Perky said, spreading out his tail and blowing out the crimson hose that stretched from his beak to his breast.

"Then tell us what it is."

"And if I don't wish to, what then?"

"Oh, but you must, you must!" they all cried together. "After all, you are the cleverest bird among us. Come, now, be a dear and tell us. It won't cost you anything."

But Mr. Turkey-Perky was not one to let himself be easily persuaded. He smirked and simpered for a time before finally

bringing out:

"Very well, then, I will, but not before you tell me what you think of me."

"Everyone knows you are the cleverest of the birds! " they told him in chorus. "Clever as a turkey" is the saying."

"Am I to understand that you have due respect for me then? "

"We have, we have! "

Mr. Turkey-Perky smirked and simpered a little more, and then he spread out all his feathers, blew out his hose, walked three times round the strafge, prickly creature lying in the hollow and said:

"That is ... m-m... You wish to know what that is? "

"We do, we do! ... Don't keep us waiting, hurry and tell us."

"It's, it's ... a someone crawling ... er ... someplace."

At this they all smiled and would have burst out laughing had not a low chuckle come from the hollow at just that moment.

"Tee-hee! Call that the cleverest of the birds! " a thin little voice said.

A little black muzzle with two bead-like black eyes on it peeped out from under the coat of needles, a little black nose sniffed the air, and the same little voice said:

"Hullo there, everybody! How is it you didn't recognise a hedgehog when you saw him? You'll pardon me, I don't know how to put it more politely, but I must say that that Mr. Turkey-Perky of yours is nothing but a dunderhead! "

At first all of them were stunned, and then a terrible hullabaloo broke out. That Mr. Hedgehog should so insult the worthy Mr. Turkey-Perky struck the birds all of a heap. They were outraged. Of course, what Mr. Turkey-Perky had said was foolish, but that did not mean that Mr. Hedgehog had the right to abuse him. At best, it was simply bad manners to come to another's house and insult him. Whatever else might be said about him, Mr. Turkey-Perky was a

respectable bird and not to be compared to a wretched little hedgehog!

"Mr. Hedgehog must think us a bunch of fools!" Mr. Rooster cried, beating his wings. "He has insulted us all!"

"If anyone's a fool it's that hedgehog!" Mr. Gander announced, stretching out his neck. "I noticed it the moment I set eyes on him."

"Is there such a thing as a foolish mushroom, then?" Mr. Hedgehog slyly returned.

"What's the use of talking to him!" Mr. Rooster screamed. "He won't understand anything anyway. We're only wasting our time. If you, Mr. Gander, grab him by the needles on one side, and Mr. Turkey-Perky and I do the same on the other, everyone will see who is more clever—he or us. I'm sure no one with brains would hide under all those foolish needles."

"I'm all for it!" Mr. Gander said. "However, I do think it might be better if I were to grab him by the needles, and you, Mr. Rooster, were to peck him on the muzzle. That would show who is cleverer even sooner."

Through all this Mr. Turkey-Perky said nothing. At first Mr. Hedgehog's cheek had so shocked him that he quite lost the use of his tongue. But then he was seized with such fury that it frightened him a little. He felt an urge to pounce on the hedgehog and tear him to bits, thus proving to everyone there that no one could insult so clever a bird as himself and expect to go unpunished. With that in mind, he made several mincing steps toward Mr. Hedgehog, blew out his hose as far as it would go and puffed himself out at the same time. But just as he was about to pounce on him, his friends all began shouting at Mr. Hedgehog and berating him, and he felt it to be the wiser course to stop and wait patiently to see how it would all end.

It was when Mr. Rooster came up with a new plan and said that the three of them should attack Mr. Hedgehog together that Mr. Turkey-Perky found his tongue at last.

"Allow me, ladies and gentlemen," he said. "Perhaps this can be settled peacefully. I believe there has been a little misunderstanding here and should like the whole matter to be left to me."

"Vere well, have it your way!" Mr. Rooster, who was all for fighting Mr. Hedgehog there and then, reluctantly agreed. "Only nothing will come of it, anyway."

"We'll see about that," said Mr. Turkey-Perky calmly. "I am taking the matter in my own hands. Just listen and you will hear what it is I have to say to Mr. Hedgehog."

At this they all moved closer to Mr. Hedgehog and waited. Mr. Turkey-Perky walked slowly round him, and, clearing his throat, said:

"Look here, Mr. Hedgehog, hack-hack, let us talk this over seriously. I strongly dislike all domestic troubles."

"Dear me, how very clever my husband is!" Mrs. Turkey-Perky said to herself, listening to him admiringly.

"Pray, take note that you find yourself in respectable and well-behaved company," Mr. Turkey-Perky went on. "And that is of some importance, is it not! There are many who would consider it an honour to be present in this yard."

"Hear, hear!" the other birds called out.

"But that is just something I wanted you to know and is not the most important thing."

Mr. Turkey-Perky paused, and, to give weight to his words, remained silent for a few moments.

"Now, as to what is of the greatest importance," he went on. "Did you really think, Mr. Hedgehog, that we had no idea what a hedgehog was like? I do not doubt that Mr. Gander was only joking when he said you were a mushroom, and so were Mr. Rooster and the rest. Isn't that so, everybody?"

"You're absolutely right, Mr. Turkey-Perky!" his friends exclaimed, and they made such a noise that Mr. Hedgehog was startled and his little black muzzle vanished under his coat of needles.

"My husband is so clever, so very clever!" Mrs. Turkey-Perky, who was beginning to understand what would follow, told herself again.

"As you can see, Mr. Hedgehog, we all like our little jokes.

myself included," Mr. Turkey-Perky proceeded. "And why in the world should we not? What is more, Mr. Hedgehog, it seems to me that you have a sense of humour, too, no less than the rest of us and are as cheerful as any."

"You're right there," Mr. Hedgehog said, showing his muzzle again. "In fact, so cheerful and full of high spirits am I that it keeps me from falling asleep at night. Some think it odd of me, but there it is, I cannot help it!"

"Well, you'll find that Mr. Rooster is just like you in that respect and keeps some of us awake nights by yelling like a lunatic."

This put them all in a good humour. It was as if what they had lacked to make them happy was Mr. Hedgehog's presence. And as for Mr. Turkey-Perky, he was positively jubilant at having been able to get himself out of an awkward situation.

"Confess, Mr. Hedgehog," he said with a wink. "You were only joking, were you not, when you called me a ... uh ... dunderhead?"

"Of course I was!" Mr. Hedgehog hastened to assure him. "I'm a jolly fellow by nature, as you just said."

"I was certain you were. Did you hear that, everybody?"

"We did, we did!" they all cried. "We never doubted it."

Mr. Turkey-Perky bent close to Mr. Hedgehog's ear and whispered:

"I'll tell you a secret, but you must keep it to yourself, mind! It is that I am the cleverest bird of them all. Of course, it's somewhat embarrassing to praise oneself, but there's no help for it, truth will out! ... But please, please, not a word to anyone!"



A PARABLE ABOUT MILK,  
OATMEAL AND MURKA  
THE TOMCAT



I'm a cat, I'm a cat, I'm a cat, a cat, a cat!...



Say what you like, but it was amazing! Especially because it went on day after day. It would start as soon as a saucepan of milk and one of oatmeal were set on the stove in the kitchen. They would stand there quietly for a few moments and then ... burst into speech!

“I’m Milk! ” Milk would murmur.

“I’m Oatmeal! ” Oatmeal would breathe.

The conversation would proceed in low tones at first, almost in a whisper, only to become gradually more and more heated.

“I’m Milk! ”

“I’m Oatmeal! ”

A lid would then be placed over Oatmeal, and it would grumble and fret in its saucepan like an old, old woman, getting angrier and angrier and finally sending up a bubble that, as it burst, would say with a puff: “I’m Oatmeal, and there’s nothing like me! ”

Milk found such boasting quite distasteful. Oatmeal of all things—a wonder indeed! And so heated would it become that it would rise in a cap of foam in its saucepan and try to climb out of it. Cook had only to look away for a moment, and there was Milk pouring out on to the stove.

“Oh, that Milk! ” Cook would complain. “One has only to take one’s eyes from it, and away it runs.”

“I can’t help it if I’m so quick-tempered! ” Milk would say, trying to justify itself. “It doesn’t make me any too happy either when I fly into a rage. But why will Oatmeal keep boasting that way, saying over and over again in those fretful tones: ‘I’m Oatmeal, I’m Oatmeal, there’s nothing like me! ’ It makes me boil to hear it.”

Things would come to a head when Oatmeal too, as sometimes happened, escaped from its saucepan. It would lift the lid and crawl out on to the stove, saying with a hiss: “I’m Oatmeal, I’m Oatmeal, I’m Oatmeal, Oatmeal, Oatmeal....”

True, this did not happen very often, but when it did, Cook would say despairingly:

"Oh, that Oatmeal! ... Why can't it stay in its saucepan?"

Cook was often upset, and she had good reason for it. Take Murka the Tomcat, for instance. Not that Murka wasn't a handsome cat, he was, and Cook was very fond of him. But every morning began with Murka following Cook about wherever she went and miaowing so pitifully that even a heart of stone could not help but be moved by it.

"Don't you ever have your fill!" Cook would say in surprise, shooing Murka away. "I should think you'd burst with all the liver that went into you yesterday!"

"That was yesterday," Murka would bring out in the same pitiful tones. "I'm hungry again today... Miaow!..."

"Why don't you catch yourself a mouse and eat it, you little loafer!"

"That's easy to say, but just try catching a mouse yourself," Murka would reply. "Besides, I do try! I caught a baby mouse only last week, and I would have caught a rat this big if it hadn't caught me by the nose first. See this big scratch running straight across it?"

Having had his fill of liver, Murka would settle down by the stove, where it was warmer, close his eyes and doze sweetly away.

"Just see how he's gorged himself!" Cook would say in wonder. "And there he lies, the old lazybones, with his eyes squeezed shut. It's always meat he'll have, nothing else."

"I'm not a monk to live on bread and water alone," Murka would bring out, opening one of his eyes. "And I like fish too, besides meat. In fact, I haven't been able to make up my mind which is better: meat or fish. I eat both out of politeness. If I were born a man I'd be either a fisherman or a butcher. Then I would see to it that not only I, but all cats had enough to eat."

After a meal and a snooze Murka liked to amuse himself in various ways. He would sit on the window-sill near the birdcage for

an hour or so and watch the foolish little starling skip about in it.

"I know you, you old cheat!" the starling would call down to him. "Stop looking at me like that!"

"Don't you want us to be friends?"

"Friends indeed! Up to your tricks again? Who was it that ate my friend the sparrow, you horrid thing!"

"I'm not at all horrid. On the contrary. Everyone loves me. Come down to me, and I'll tell you a fairy tale."

"You and your fairy tales. What a rogue you are! I saw you telling a fairy tale to the fried chicken you stole from Cook."

"Do as you like, I was only trying to be nice. And as for the chicken, it's true I ate it, but then it wasn't good for anything else, was it?"

### 3

One of Murka's daily habits was to sit down by the stove, once it was lit, and patiently listen to Milk and Oatmeal quarrelling. He could never quite make out what they quarrelled about and only blinked his eyes in wonder.

"I'm Milk, I'm Milk, I'm Milk, Milk, Milk! ..."

"I'm Oatmeal, I'm Oatmeal, I'm Oatmeal, Oatmeal, Oatmeal! ..."

"I can't make head or tail of this," Murka would say. "What is it that makes them so angry? Now, if I were to say over and over again 'I'm Cat, I'm Cat, I'm Cat, Cat, Cat!' would that hurt anyone's feelings? It's strange, it's awfully strange.... However, I must confess I prefer Milk, especially before it boils up like that."

One day Milk and Oatmeal had such a bad quarrel and flew into such a rage that they both ran out on to the stove. The kitchen filled with smoke, and Cook came running and threw up her hands in horror.

"What am I going to do now!" she cried, picking up the two saucepans with what remained of Milk and Oatmeal in them. "All I

did was turn away for a second."

And putting the saucepans on the table, she took her shopping bag and set out for the market. No sooner had she closed the door behind her than Murka moved up closer to Milk, blew at it and said:

"Please don't be cross, Milk."

It was clear that Milk was beginning to calm down. Murka padded all round it, blew at it again, smoothed out his whiskers and said very gently:

"It isn't at all nice to quarrel, my friends. I'll judge you fairly if only you let me and help you make up."

"The old rogue, the things he thinks up! Judge you fairly indeed," said a Black Beetle, nearly choking with laughter. He had been sitting in a chink in the wall and had heard it all.

But Milk and Oatmeal were glad to have someone try and make peace between them. They could not have said for the life of them what they found to quarrel about.

"Don't worry, I'll be fair enough," said Murka. "I'm a fair-minded cat and won't go against my conscience. Come, now, let us start with Milk."

He walked round the saucepan, in which Milk was cooling, several times, tried Milk with his paw, blew at it and then set to and began lapping it up.

"Help! Help!" Beetle cried. "He'll drink up all the milk, and they'll think I did it."

When Cook returned, she found the saucepan quite empty, with Murka dozing sweetly by the stove as if nothing had happened.

"You bad thing you!" Cook cried, grabbing him by the ear. "Out with it now! Who drank up the milk?"

Though his ear smarted badly, Murka pretended that he did not understand what had been said or know how to speak. And when Cook had thrown him out of the kitchen he shook himself, licked his coat, smoothed out his tail and said:

"If I were in Cook's place, I'd keep all the cats busy doing nothing but lapping milk from morning till night. But I'm not mad at her. She simply does not understand."





TIME FOR BED





Sleep, Alyonushka, sleep tight and grow big  
and strong.

One of Alyonushka's little eyes is closing, and one of her little ears is falling asleep... .

"Are you here, Daddy? " she asks.

"Yes, child, I am."

"You know what, Daddy? I want to be a princess."

Alyonushka goes to sleep, and she smiles in her sleep.

There are so many beautiful flowers all about her, and all of them are smiling. They have crowded round Alyonushka's bed, and they are whispering and laughing in their thin little voices. Some of them are red, some blue, some yellow, some pink, some white. It's as though a rainbow had fallen from the sky and strewn the earth with multicoloured sparks.

"Alyonushka wants to be a princess! " the Bluebells tinkled, swaying on their fragile green stalks.

"How funny she is! " the modest little Forget-Me-Nots murmured.

"It's something we have got to talk over seriously," said a yellow Dandelion. "I, for one, never expected it of her."

"What does being a princess mean? " a Cornflower asked. "I have grown up in the country, and these city ways are beyond me."

"It's very simple," said a glowing pink Carnation. "It's so simple that there's really nothing to explain. A princess is—how strange that you should not understand! —something like a queen. Now, the queen of the flowers is the pink Carnation. So what Alyonushka wants to be is a pink Carnation. It's as clear as daylight."

They all laughed at this, and only the Roses were silent. If the truth be told, the Roses were hurt. For wasn't it common knowledge that the queen of the flowers is the Rose, the tender, fragrant, beautiful Rose! And here was a poor little Carnation calling herself queen. The nerve of it! ... The Roses grew angrier and angrier, and pinker and pinker, and one of them, which had turned a flaming red, said:

' I beg your pardon, but it's a Rose and not a Carnation that

Alyonushka wants to be. The Rose is the queen and it's the Rose that everyone likes so much."

"A fine thing!" the Dandelion brought out angrily. "If that is the case, then what am I supposed to be?"

"Don't be cross, Dandelion," the Bluebells said. "It isn't nice to be cross and will only turn you sour in the end. Look at us. We haven't said a word about Alyonushka wanting to be a Bluebell. And why? Because it's something that goes without saying."

There were so many flowers and, oh, how angry they got and how funny it was to hear them arguing! The wild flowers, Lilies-of-the-Valley, Violets, Forget-Me-Nots, Bluebells, Cornflowers and others like them, were more or less modest, but the Roses, Tulips, Lilies, Daffodils and Gillyflowers, that had grown up in gardens and hothouses, were not, and put on airs like spoiled, overdressed children.

Alyonushka liked the wild flowers more—they were such dears! —and often wove garlands of them or made them up into nosegays.

"Alyonushka is very fond of us," the Violets whispered. "We are the first to come up in spring. The snow has only to melt, and there we are!"

"We too," the Lilies-of-the-Valley said. "We grow in the woods and are not at all spoiled."

"It's not our fault that we can't stand the cold and grow in the open field," the fragrant, curly-headed Gillyflowers and Hyacinths brought out plaintively. "We're only guests here and come from far away where it is always warm. We can't begin to tell you how we miss our homeland, it's such a lovely place. And so warm! It's dreadfully cold in the north. But we know that Alyonushka is fond of us too."

"Well, we like the north," the wild flowers returned. "It does get

quite cold at times, but that's only for the better, because the cold kills the worms and the bugs who are our worst enemies. If it weren't for the cold, we'd fare badly."

"We don't mind a little cold either," the Roses said.

"Nor do we!" the Azaleas and Camellias called out loudly.

The cold, you see, was good for them when they budded out into bloom.

"Let's tell Alyonushka about the different places we come from," a white Daffodil suggested. "I'm sure she will enjoy it. It is not only the Roses she likes. She likes all of us."

At this they all began to speak at once. The Roses tearfully recalled Shiraz and its beautiful valleys, the Hyacinths spoke breathlessly of Palestine, the Azaleas of America, the Lilies of Egypt. There were flowers there from all the corners of the earth, and each had much to tell. Most of the flowers, as it turned out, came from southern parts where there was plenty of sunshine and no winter. There was no place like the south, they insisted, for where else was there summer the whole year round and where else were the trees so huge and the birds so beautiful? There were butterflies there too, gorgeous ones, that looked like flowers, and flowers that looked like butterflies.

"We're only guests here in the north, and we're cold," they whispered. And so pitiful did they sound that the wild flowers, most of whom were born in the north, felt sorry for them. It did take a lot of patience to be able to endure the gusty northern wind, the rain and the snow. It was only a spring snow, to be sure, and bound to melt away soon enough, but it was snow all the same.

"Now, just listen to me," Cornflower said. "I won't argue with you, I'll admit that occasionally one of you can be more beautiful than a humble wild flower like me. Besides, you are our guests, and one has got to be polite to one's guests. But you have one great shortcoming, and it is that you are the flowers of the rich, while we belong to all, rich and poor. We are far, far kinder and more generous than you. Take me, for instance. I am there to be picked by the poorest village child, and I give one and all such pleasure! I am not

sold in shops for money. They have only to go out into a field of wheat or rye, and there I am amid the stalks! ”

Alyonushka listened to the flowers and marvelled. How she longed to see for herself the wonderful places they had told her about!

“If I were a bird, I’d go flying off to southern parts right now,” she said. “I wish I had wings!”

She had hardly finished speaking, when a Ladybug, a bright red one with black dots on its back, a tiny black head and thin little legs, crawled up to her.

“Come, Alyonushka, let us fly off together!” the Ladybug said softly, moving its whiskers.

“But ... but I have no wings, Ladybug!”

“Climb on my back, then.”

“How can I do that? You’re much too small.”

“Am I now? Just watch!”

And to Alyonushka’s surprise, the Ladybug spread out its two stiff upper wings and then its two lower ones, that were as thin as a spider’s web, and turned gradually bigger and bigger till at last it was so big that Alyonushka was able to climb on its back and feel very comfortable there.

“Are you all right, Alyonushka? ” the Ladybug asked.

“I’m fine, thank you.”

“Well, then, hold tight!”

In another moment they were up in the air and soaring higher, and Alyonushka squeezed her eyes shut in fear. It seemed to her that it was not she who was flying but the hills, forests, rivers and towns beneath her. She felt that she was somehow turning smaller and smaller, and was now no larger than a pinhead and as light as a bit of fluff.

They were flying very fast now, the wind whistling as the

Ladybug cut the air with its wings.

“Look down now, Alyonushka, and tell me what you see,” the Ladybug said.

Alyonushka looked down, and when she saw what it was that spread beneath, she threw up her hands in wonder. The ground seemed to be covered with a blanket of Roses.

“Oh, so many Roses!” she cried. “Red ones and white ones and pink ones and yellow ones. Do let us come down now, Ladybug!”

They came down slowly, and as soon as Alyonushka’s feet touched the ground she found that she was as big again and the Ladybug as little as they had been before.

Alyonushka rushed up and down over the field of Roses, picking the flowers one after another and not stopping till she had a large bunch of them. How beautiful the Roses were and what a lovely fragrance they gave off! It was so strong it made her head swim. If only she could carry this whole field off with her to her home in the north where Roses were such dearly loved and welcome guests!

“Let us fly farther now,” the Ladybug said, spreading out its wings. It had turned very large again and Alyonushka very tiny.

They were up in the air again and flying over a rocky coast. The sky was very blue and so was the sea spreading beneath.

“Are we going to fly across the sea?” Alyonushka asked in wonder.

“Yes. So sit there quietly and hold on fast.”

Now there was nothing but sky and water beneath them, and at first Alyonushka was frightened. But then her fear passed. There were large boats sweeping across the sea and looking like white-winged birds, and small boats too that seemed no bigger than bugs. Oh, it was beautiful! By and by, the shore, low and sandy, came into sight ahead of them, and then the mouth of a large river and a city that seemed built of sugar it was so white. Farther on, spread a

huge dead desert with pyramids rising over it. The Ladybug came down on a river bank where grew luscious green Papyri and lovely, tender Lilies.

"What a wonderful place!" Alyonushka said to the Lilies. "Is it here that there's never any winter?"

"Winter? What is winter?" the Lilies asked.

"It's when the snow keeps falling all the time," Alyonushka explained.

"Snow? What is snow?" they asked again, giggling because they thought that this little girl who came from the north was making fun of them. Of course, every year birds, great flocks of them, came flying here and they too spoke of winter, but then they had never seen it themselves and only repeated what others had told them.

Alyonushka, for her part, found it hard to believe the Lilies. No winter? Was that possible? And did it mean that you could do without a warm coat and felt boots?

They flew on, but by now Alyonushka was too tired and hot to marvel at the blue sea, the mountains or the sun-baked stretches of land where grew the Hyacinths.

"I'm so hot!" she complained. "You know, Ladybug, to have summer all the time isn't such a good thing after all."

"It depends on what one is used to," the Ladybug replied.

They were making for a range of tall mountains now, their peaks covered with snow. It was less hot here. Beyond the mountains lay impenetrable forests where it was dark because the crowns of the trees were too thick to be pierced by sunlight. Here dwelled innumerable birds, dazzlingly bright in their coats of green, red, yellow and blue, and monkeys that kept jumping from branch to branch. But the most marvellous sight of all were the flowers that grew on the tree trunks. Some were the colour of flame, others were motley-coloured, and many resembled birds or butterflies. They were like sparkling, living flashes of light, and the forest glowed with them.

"Those are Orchids," the Ladybug said.

The trees and the vines and the grasses were closely intertwined here, making passage impossible, and the Ladybug, with Alyonushka

on her back, flew on. Soon, spreading beneath them between bright banks of green, they saw a river. Growing on the water was a large white and pink flower, and the Ladybug came down on it. Alyonushka had never seen so huge a flower.

"That is the Lotus, and it is a sacred flower," the Ladybug explained.

5

Alyonushka had seen so much that she was quite tired and longed to be back home: however nice it was here, home was better.

"I love snow," she said. "I don't like it when there's no winter."

They were flying again, and the higher they rose the colder it grew. Snowy glades soon showed below and a green forest of firs and pines. Alyonushka was overjoyed at the sight of the first fir tree.

"A Fir Tree, a Fir Tree!" she cried.

"Hullo there, Alyonushka!" the Fir Tree called up to her.

It was a very lovely tree, a true Christmas tree, Alyonushka saw. She bent down to tell the Fir Tree how much she liked it, lost her balance and fell from the Ladybug's back! Oh, how frightened she was! Down she flew, and she turned over in the air several times before coming to rest on the snowy ground below. The snow was fluffy and soft, but Alyonushka closed her eyes in fear, not knowing if she was dead or alive.

"How did you get here, little one?" someone asked her.

Alyonushka opened her eyes and saw a bent, grey-haired old man standing before her. Him too she knew at once. He was Father Frost, the kindly old man who brings all good children golden stars, boxes of sweets, toys, and other beautiful things to hang on their trees at Christmas. He was so nice, was Father Frost! He took Alyonushka up in his arms, bundled her up in his fur coat and asked again:

"Come, tell me, little one, how did you get here?"

"I've been travelling on a Ladybug's back, Grandpa, and I saw no end of interesting things!"

“That’s nice.”

“I know you, Grandpa, you bring children toys for Christmas.”

“Yes, that’s right. I’m decorating a tree right now.” And he showed her a long staff which did not in the least look like a tree.

“Oh, but that’s not a tree, Grandpa, it’s just a stick,” Alyonushka said.

“Just you wait and see, little one, just you wait and see.”

And holding Alyonushka in his arms, Father Frost carried her to a small village, its houses buried in snow and only the roofs and chimneys showing.

The village children were already waiting for Father Frost. “Father Frost! Father Frost!” they shouted at sight of him, jumping up and down in excitement.

Father Frost came up to the first house, got out a sheaf of oats, tied it to the end of the staff, and, lifting the staff on to the roof, propped it up there. At once, from all sides, the birds, those of them who do not go away to southern parts in winter—sparrows, buntings and others like them—came flying and began pecking the grain.

“Father Frost has brought us a Christmas tree!” they cried.

Alyonushka was overjoyed. Never before had she seen a Christmas tree made specially for birds. How kind Father Frost was!

One of the sparrows, who seemed to be making more noise than any of them, looked up and saw Alyonushka.

“Why, it’s Alyonushka!” he cried. “I know her very well. She gave me bread crumbs to eat many times.”

At this, the other sparrows too looked up, and, seeing Alyonushka, began shrilling and piping in joy.

Just then one other sparrow, and a great bully he turned out to be, came flying up. He began pushing and jostling the others and snatching the best grains for himself. Alyonushka knew him at once. He was the very same sparrow who had fought with the ruff.

“Hullo there, Sparrow!” she called.

“Oh, is that you, Alyonushka? Hullo!”

The sparrow hopped up and down on one leg, gave Alyonushka a sly wink and said to Father Frost:

"Do you know that Alyonushka wants to be a princess, Father Frost? I heard her say so just the other day."

"So you want to be a princess, little one, do you?" Father Frost asked her.

"I do, Grandpa, very much!"

"Good. There's nothing easier. Every princess is a woman, and every woman is a princess. Now go on home and tell that to other little girls."

The Ladybug was very glad to have Alyonushka on her back again. She was in a great hurry to get away before some mischief-maker of a sparrow caught sight of her and ate her up. They flew home very fast, and when they got there, found that all the flowers in the garden were waiting for Alyonushka. They had been arguing all this time about what a princess was and were eager to have Alyonushka tell them what she had learned.

Rock-a-bye, little one, rock-a-bye.

One of Alyonushka's little eyes sleeps, and the other is awake; one of her little ears sleeps, and the other listens. Everyone has gathered round Alyonushka's bed: the Rabbit, the Bear, the Cock, the Sparrow, the Crow, the Ruff, and the teeniest-weeniest little bug that ever lived. They are all here, at Alyonushka's bedside.

"Daddy, I love them all," Alyonushka whispers. "I love them all, Daddy, even the beetles and the roaches."

Alyonushka's other little eye closes, and her other little ear falls asleep.

Alyonushka sleeps, and the spring grass gaily pushes up its green blades beside her bed, and the flowers smile at her. There are many flowers there—blue and pink and yellow and violet and red ones. A slender little birch tree bends over Alyonushka and whispers something very tender into her ear. The sun shines brightly, the yellow sand gleams, and the blue sea waves dance up and down and call to her.

Sleep, Alyonushka, sleep tight and grow big and strong.

Hush-a-bye, little one, hush-a-bye.







